

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PARENT ORIENTATION PROGRAM
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

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Although most institutions offer a parent program option to the orientation program, there has been little formalized research into the quality, planning or programming of parent orientation. There has been very little research into the impact parent orientation has on parents and whether or not they feel that such programs have met their needs, particularly by gender, minority status, educational background, or by geographic distance from the institution.

This study seeks to determine the effectiveness of the parent orientation program at the University of North Texas to the parents who participate in this program. The study attempts to measure whether parents feel that they have adequate information about the institution to adequately support their student through the college transition; if parents feel welcomed by the UNT campus community; and if they feel that they have developed resources and institutional contacts that may be useful in the future in assisting their child to have a successful college experience at UNT.

The study, conducted in the summer of 2002, had 736 respondents. An instrument developed to determine parent's perceptions of the effectiveness of the parent orientation program consisted of 31 questions using a Likert scale. A t-Test was utilized to analyze the data because it is designed to compare the means of the same variable with two different groups.

Generally, all aspects of the parent orientation program were found to be positive by each subgroup. Parents found value in the orientation program and how it prepared them to support their new college student. In all four components studied, women had a stronger feeling than the males. Minority status had no significant impact on the outcomes of orientation according to the participants. Educational background proved not to be a significant factor. Distance parents lived from UNT revealed significant difference in three of the four categories. The farther a parent resides from UNT, the more valuable the orientation experience was for them.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many new freshmen see their entry into college as the end of their relationship with their parents and for years, colleges assumed that same notion to be valid (Austin, 1997). Many institutions have disregarded the importance that familial and parental support can have on the success and development of a university student (Adams, Ryan, and Keating, 2000). Parents frequently know their student better than any other person on campus and they have the ability to forecast the future needs and encouragement their child will require during their college career (Hatch, 2000). A study by Wintre and Yaffe (2000) found that parents continue to play a very important role in their child's life during their college years.

From about 1913 to 1961 (Kaplin & Lee, 1995) the notion of *in loco parentis* used to be the main theme driving the relationships that institutions had with students and the responsibility they felt toward their students' parents. *In loco parentis* is a legal reference that means the institution stands in place of the parent (Hoekema, 1994). This ability to stand in place of the parent allowed college campuses the flexibility and freedom to dictate practice and policy in a manner they considered to be most beneficial to the student. However, since *in loco parentis* was ruled unconstitutional by numerous court cases when it was applied to persons of legal adult age (Cohen, 1985; Hoekema, 1994; Kaplin & Lee, 1995), campuses have been trying to determine what should stand in its

place (Boyer, 1987). Daniel and Scott state in their editor's notes that "the increased involvement of parents throughout students' collegiate experiences- necessitates a post – in loco parentis stance"(p. 1). But what should this new stance or relationship be?

Cohen (1985) suggested a "triad" relationship with parents be established where the institution, the parent, and the student are all inter-related and the institution works with the parents in order to help develop the students. It is this notion of establishing a partnership with parents that has encouraged institutions to create more programs and services for students' parents as well as increase their official communication with them.

While the primary purpose of an institution is to focus on the student, a campus would be remiss if it did not place the necessary emphasis on the relationships that students have with their families and the potential these relationships have in the students' personal development and success in their collegiate career. This newfound relationship between colleges and parents has allowed institutions to learn more about the potential that can be yielded through parental involvement in the collegiate experience. For instance, institutions need not forget that students retain dual membership in the family community even though they have accepted membership in the campus community (Cohen, 1985).

In addition, having a child leave for college can produce mixed emotions from parents – they are excited about the prospect of college, but anxious and sad about the separation (Tederman, 1997). Institutions must respond to these emotions and help parents to both understand them and resolve them so that they can assume a role of support for their child.

Parents, therefore, are an important constituency for colleges. Parent's expectations of college and their own experiences help to form the expectations of their children as they enter this new environment (Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, Ward-Roof, 2000). Their influence on their child's perceptions as well as their continued involvement in their child's college life as a source of reassurance and guidance (Austin, 1997) mandates that the institution pay attention to parent's needs. Wintre and Sugar (2000) feel that parents should be provided necessary information and involved wherever possible in the university transition. Given their continued relationship, it makes sense to involve the parents in the orientation process (Jacobs, unpublished manuscript), since it is typically one of the first experiences a student and parent will have with an institution and it is the major program dealing with transition issues.

Brief History of Parent Orientation

Although orientation for new students dates back to Harvard and the beginnings of higher education (Hadlock, 2000), there is very little research documenting the history of parent orientation. However, Perigo (1985) notes that it is the recent past, assumedly prior to 1985, where parents were not typically included in the orientation programs of new students. Additionally, the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) Handbook for Orientation Directors (1978) notes that little was done at that time to accommodate the needs and concerns of parents.

These early programs focused more on reception type activities that served more as a welcome than anything else. There were no programs that addressed substantial issues such as separation or transition. Since nothing else was usually offered, parents

typically went home leaving their child to attend his or her new student orientation program (Coburn and Woodward, 2001).

By the mid-1980's it was recorded by NODA that almost 90% of responding institutions (349) offered a parent orientation program. Coburn and Woodward (2001) state that almost all orientation programs offer a parent component in some form or fashion. These changes stem from, according to Coburn and Woodward (2001), the changing relationship the institution has with parents with the absence of in loco parentis. Institutions have been forced to create a new type of relationship that is more in tune with the changing family dynamics of the age (Coburn and Woodward, 2001) and with applicable laws.

What have emerged from these changes in relationships are parent orientation programs that are diverse and unique to each institution. Programs vary in length, design, components, and structure (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001). However, the driving theme for all is enlisting the parent as a partner in the success of the student and the institution.

Parent Orientation at the University of North Texas

Parent orientation at the University of North Texas has evolved over the last thirty-five years from a brief reception to a three-day/two-night orientation program around 1971 that still exists today. When parent orientation first began in the late 1960's, parents were met with a small reception of punch and cookies as they dropped their child off for orientation. This reception was a way of welcoming parents to campus and introducing them to a few key administrators. It also served the function of providing

something of value to the parents as they waited for their child to get *settled in* and say their good-byes. It was during these first few years that administrators noticed parents had questions and concerns about their child's new college endeavor that were more involved and demanded more time than the short program they currently offered. It was from this point that the parent program was expanded (M. Collinsworth, personal communication, March 30, 2002; D. Norton, personal communication, April 1, 2002; J.G. Stewart, personal communication, March, 29, 2002).

This expanded program began in the summer of 1974 (J.G. Stewart, personal communication, March 29, 2002) at a time when many other campuses were not offering a parent program. Perigo (1985) states that in 1978 the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) sent out a "plea for parent involvement to those who design and coordinate orientation programs" (p.38). It seems that UNT may have been somewhat of a trailblazer in the area of parent orientation by offering a formalized program. UNT's three-day/two-night program was substantially more than most offered at that particular time. The majority of current parent orientation programs, 64% according to Coburn and Woodward (2001), still only offer a session that lasts one day or less.

The three-day/two-night program for parents was structured to parallel the three-day/two-night student program. However, because UNT administrators felt it was important to separate the parents from the students so that the students could adequately focus on their orientation process and also so that the institution could concentrate on the needs of the parents, only one session, focusing on general academic advising, included both the parents and students. Other programs for the parents focused on student services,

including financial aid, police, academic assistance, student employment, student involvement opportunities, safety and security, and housing and dining and were held concurrent to new student orientation activities (J.G. Stewart, personal communication, March 29, 2002).

Additionally, opportunities were provided for parents to meet on an informal basis with academic deans and other administrators. Student leaders in a panel presentation discussed college life and their personal transition issues as well as their success stories.

During the early years there was no charge to the parents for their orientation program. Funds were drawn from the student orientation program to finance the sessions for the parents. As the program has expanded, a fee has been established separate from the students' fee to fund the parent program.

Currently the parent orientation program includes a wide variety of sessions that focus on transition issues for the parents, as well as those of the student. Sessions that identify and explain student support services as well as involvement opportunities are also provided. Within the last three years sessions have been added to expose parents to the philosophy of not only the institution but also to the particular academic program to which their child will major. Academic deans and vice presidents, as well as the president of the institution, regularly address the parents to provide a basis for the institutional and parental relationship.

The schedule for parents today is based on the same format as it began over thirty years ago. However, there are more sessions and programs planned and designed especially for the parents.

Statement of the Problem

Most institutions have begun the practice of offering a parent orientation option for the families of incoming freshman. With this emergence there has been little formalized research into the quality, planning or programming of parent orientation. No set guidelines are available for such design and institutions have been on their own to create programs that met the needs of the parents of their students and that were in alignment with their institutional goals. Additionally, there has been very little research into the impact parent orientation has on the parents and whether or not the parents feel that such programs have met their needs. Specifically, no study was found that compares the elements of program effectiveness by gender, minority status, educational background, or by geographic distance from the institution.

Purpose of the Study

Hence, this study seeks to determine the effectiveness of the parent orientation program at the University of North Texas to the parents who participate in this program. More specifically, the study will attempt to measure whether parents feel that they have adequate information about the institution to adequately support their student through the college transition, if parents feel welcomed by the UNT campus community and if they feel that they have developed resources and institutional contacts that may be useful in the future in assisting their child to have a successful college experience at UNT.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Is there a difference between the perceived value of parent orientation by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas?
2. Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel they are adequately equipped with the tools and information they need about UNT to be able to support their son/daughter in college?
3. Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel informed about the relationship and family changes that will likely occur due to their child attending college?
4. Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance from home of the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel as if they have established a positive relationship with the University of North Texas?

Significance of the Study

The resulting data from this study will be utilized by UNT to determine if the current parent orientation program being offered is of sufficient effectiveness and quality to warrant the continued effort and cost associated with it.

The data will also delineate if UNT is meeting the needs of selected parent subgroups. In doing so, different programs or strategies can be implemented to improve orientation so that the parents in these subgroups (males and females, minorities and non-

minorities, and parents who live within fifty miles of UNT and those who live further than fifty miles from UNT) can better support their child at UNT. These data could ultimately lead to greater retention of these students.

Additionally, the resulting data could be utilized in UNT's reaccreditation self-study scheduled to be conducted for Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 2006 and will add to the limited published research on parent orientation effectiveness in meeting institutional goals.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study the following terms are defined:

1. Value: For the purpose of this study, value is defined as finding worth and benefit of attending the parent orientation program.
2. Tools is defined as information on services, programs and resources that an institution offers to parents during orientation that parents can later utilize to assist their child (Coburn and Woodward, 2001).
3. Separation issues and family changes are the transition issues associated with a child coming to college including the changing parent/child relationship and new family dynamics.
4. Institution/parent relationship is the relationship initiated by the institution to show the parents that the institution cares not only about their child, but about the parents as well (Austin, 1997).

Limitations

This study is limited to parents who attended parent orientation at the University

of North Texas during the summer of 2002. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to other institutions. The candor of the respondents will have an impact on the analysis of the data they supply.

Delimitations

Only those parents who participate through the entirety of each parent orientation session are being surveyed at the conclusion of each three-day/two-night program. Since parents cannot fully evaluate the program unless they participate in its entirety, those that don't will be systematically excluded from the study. This may reduce the population of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Even though the orientation of new students can be traced back to Harvard and the beginnings of higher education, the history of parent orientation is relatively short. According to the few accounts available, most formal offerings of parent orientation programs can be traced back only to the 1970's. Many of these first programs consisted of refreshments and a few administrators who were available to welcome parents to campus as they brought their child for their orientation visit. These sessions also served as a means by which parents could have general and brief questions answered prior to them heading home after they had said their good-byes to their child. The ill-defined relationship between parents and institutions during that time did not recognize the potential importance parents played in the collegiate life of their student nor the positive impact that relationship could have on the success of the student. From these beginnings more formal programs emerged as parents desired to become more involved in their child's college experience and as institutions saw the value in placing time and money into such an endeavor.

This chapter is organized into the parent/child relationship and the impact parents have on student transitions; and the needs, goals, structure and components of parent orientation programs.

Parent/Child Relationships and Impact on Transition

There is a great deal of research to illustrate the impact that the college transition has on new students and how the parental relationship impacts that transition (Adams, Ryan, and Keating, 2000; Brooks and DuBois, 1995; Hickman, Bartholomae, and McKenry, 2000; Kenny and Donaldson, 1991; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Larsen, Jacobs, 1997; Lapsley, Rice and FitzGerald, 1990; Taub, 1997; Wintre and Sugar, 2000; Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). This same research indicates that parents and family serve a critical role of support during this transition to college. While Brooks and DuBois (1995) note that the potential for growth is significant during this late adolescent period, the possibility for stress and difficulty that a student will experience should not be discounted.

For many students, the adjustment to college is their first major life transition (Lapsley, Rice and FitzGerald, 1990) and one in which they may not be adequately prepared. In their study of 130 freshmen, they determined that academic and personal-emotional adjustment could be predicted by parental and peer attachment. The results suggest that family relations serve “as a secure base from which the adolescent may go forward to negotiate confidently the transition to college” (p. 565).

In addition, there is a suggestion (Wintre and Sugar, 2000) that students who are securely attached to their parents adjust better to the collegiate environment. Their study of 419 first-year students enrolled in an introductory psychology course showed that parental relationships that have a basis of open and honest communication are beneficial in assisting their student make a positive adjustment to college. The study indicated that

for males both parents were influential and for females that the father seemed to have more influence. Also, this attachment to parents (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000) provides the student with a greater sense of independence and self-confidence, which are important issues in this transition period. This follow-up study concluded similarly, noting the importance of current parental relationships to successful university transition. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) emphasize the value of involving parents and educating them about topics associated with the institution.

The literature suggests that a student's ability to adapt to college is influenced significantly by his/her resources for coping and the social resources available (Brooks and DuBois, 1995). Parents, therefore, can be seen as a source of support that is integral to the success of the student. Kenny (1987) studied a group of first-year college students to determine the function of parental attachment to their adjustment and transition to college. Respondents indicated that their parents were their secure bases and that they relied on them as a source of support. The study concluded that parental support led to increased self-confidence on the part of the students. Although women were more likely to turn to their parents for support, both women and men perceived their parents as promoting independence and being available as a resource when needed.

Taub (1997) notes that student affairs practitioners to a large extent discount the familial influence on the lives of college students. Her study of undergraduate women found that the autonomy of female students increased with each class year, but that parental attachment did not decrease. This study gives credence to the continued role of parents and seems to encourage institutions to continue relationships with parents long

after the focus of the first year. Other literature (Trusty, 2001) suggests similarly this importance, noting that it is only logical that parents serve as the most consistent and stable resource that a child has over their lifespan.

One study (Adams, Ryan, and Keating, 2000) concludes that even if the parent/student relationship is less dominant, that it is still influential during the child's university experience. They conclude that although this relationship is routinely ignored in the literature to explain developmental patterns, its power and impact cannot be overlooked.

The concept of separation is one of the most prominent issues that affect the parent/child relationship and the transition to college. Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Larsen and Jacobs (1997) indicate that separation issues begin when the student leaves for college. They also note that in order for the separation to be successful, the student must achieve a sense of balance between their newly found individuation and their attachment and connection to their family.

The Need for Parent Orientation Programs

The literature identifies two reasons why parent orientation programs should be offered. These two needs are in the areas of student retention (Austin, 1997; Boyd, 1997; Cohen, 1985, Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Hatch, 2000; Mallickrodt, 1988; Mann, 1998; Mullendore, 1998; Perigo, 1985; Scott & Daniel, 2001; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984) and parental support and involvement (Austin, 1997; Boyd, Hunt, P, Hunt, S, Magoon, Van Brunt, 1997; Coburn & Woodward 2001; Dodge, 1990; Hatch, 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Jacobs & With, 2002; Kenny & Donaldson, 1992; Mullendore, 1998;

Newman & Newman, 1992; Perigo, 1985; Tederman, 1997; Trusty, 2001; Wintre & Sugar, 2000; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000).

As retention agents, parents have influence like almost no other. As institutions continue to acquire this concept, the more apt they will be to incorporate parents into the collegiate experience. The ability to take a systematic and planned approach to involving parents allows for greater influence on the success of new students (Scott & Daniel, 2001). Parent orientation lends itself to this systematic approach since nearly all facets of the institution must be involved in the orientation process if it is to be comprehensive and effective.

Tinto's research (1975) showed that a student's decision to stay in school was related to both academic and social success. Parental support, as noted by Mallinckrodt (1988) has shown to be a key source in the social success of students. In this research, Mallinckrodt studied the perceptions that Black and White freshmen had on social support and dropout intention. The author determined that social support is an important factor in student retention. Specifically, the study concluded that family support was especially important for White students in their persistence in college. According to the study, the same notion is not true for Black students. It is the support from the campus community that had a greater impact on these students. Parent orientation has the ability to provide information to parents that can better equip them to be social support agents for their students.

Coburn and Woodward (2001) purport that parents who have an understanding of the institution are more likely to know how and when to intervene on behalf of their

student. Those parents who have attended orientation are more likely to have knowledge of the expectations the institutions have for its students and a more realistic concept of what their child may be experiencing in college. In addition, they are more likely to have knowledge of the resources available to support students and can act as a referral agent.

It is important for parents to act as “referral agents” for their child as the child learns to navigate, not only the system, but also their new life experiences in college. Having information about the campus, services and programs, affords parents the opportunity to do just that. Additionally, the relationship should be one where the parent does not solve the problem, but provides their child with the information necessary to work toward the solution himself/herself (Austin, 1997).

Hatch (2000) notes that as students find themselves in challenging and stressful situations, they will look to their parents for support and as a touchstone during this time for security and survival. In fact for many, parents are usually the first point of contact during a crisis or a time when the student is looking for assistance in solving a problem (Mullendore, 1998). Parent orientation can communicate to parents the need for them to be supportive of their child during stressful situations. In addition, orientation leaders can educate parents about encouraging their students to seek assistance when in need from campus resources that are available to them (Mullendore, 1998).

In the area of support and involvement, Tederman (1997) states that it is vital for a campus to involve the parents because it is the institution that shares no information that “cut[s] off a potentially valuable resource for helping students and may alienate parents from the college” (p. 33). This lack of connection could be detrimental to the

student as well as the institution.

A 1990 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education elaborates on the growing desire of parents to be involved in their child's education (Dodge, 1990). The article highlights Wake Forest University who notes that many parents want to be actively involved in their child's education. The need for extensive parent orientation programs is helping to fulfill the wishes of those concerned parents who care to be actively involved as their child enters college. According to Dodge, this number continues to grow.

A study conducted by Wintre and Sugar (2000) suggests that parental involvement can have a positive impact on a freshman student's transition to college. In this study 419 first-year college students were surveyed to determine if their relationship with their parents was a predictor of university adjustment. The results indicated that parental relationships should not be ignored since mature, open relationships that contained honest communication positively impacted the transition to college. The study indicated that it was beneficial to educate parents with necessary information about the campus so that they could prepare students for college and help to alleviate stress and anxiety involved with the transition. Additionally, the study indicated that in times of stress, it was more beneficial to involve the parents in the process than to work with the students alone. Parent orientation is one way that an institution can educate the parents to be a support to their student.

In another study (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), 408 first-year students were surveyed to determine, among other variables, if their relationship with their parents affected their overall adjustment to the university. Once again, the results indicated that parental

relationships and their impact in the transition of their students should not be discounted. The study concludes that parents continue to play an important role and that an institution should work to involve the parents and to inform them about issues relevant to the transition that students will make as they enter college.

Goals of Parent Orientation Programs

The goals for most parent orientation programs are to assist in the adjustment and transition of their students to college by providing them with information about institutional services and programs and what to expect during that transition (Mullendore, 1996; Hatch, 2000; Austin 1997; Hadlock, 2000). But by focusing only on the student is where institutions have failed in the past, because although they are indeed important, they are not entirely what should be covered. The literature review identifies four themes as goals for parent orientation. They are:

1. Educating parents about the family transition (Austin, 1997; Coburn and Woodward, 2001; Hatch 2000; Jacobs & With, 2002; Mullendore 1996);
2. Providing parents with information, tools, and points of contact to support their student (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward 2001; Hadlock, 2000; Hatch 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985);
3. Creating and defining the parent/institutional relationship (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985; Scott & Daniel, 2001; Tederman,

- 1997; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, Ward-Roof, 2000); and
4. Creating positive feelings regarding their child's institution of choice (Austin, 1997; Coburn and Woodward, 2001; Jacobs, 2002; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985).

A two-year qualitative study utilizing 1382 parents of first-year students determined the hopes and goals parents had for their child's collegiate experience (Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, Ward-Roof, 2000). An interactive web site was created for parents to submit responses to the question, "What are your top three hopes or goals for your student's overall college experience?" Year one dealt with only one institution where 613 parents participated and year two another institution was added and a total of 766 parents participated. The study identified a set of goals that were consistent by gender, residency status, and institution type. The goals were quality education, job preparation, maturity, fun, graduation, friendships, and academic success. However since both institutions enroll very few non-white students, the results should be identified as only characteristic of white respondents. The goals identified by these parents can be helpful in the organization of a parents orientation program to ensure that parents are given information relating to the goals listed.

In a study conducted by Conrad (1976), he surveyed 842 freshman parents and found that a parent program that focused on the "hard" issues (p. 136) had an impact on parental attitudes. This study concludes that having an issue-oriented discussion with parents, not simply offering a public relations type program, allowed for significant changes in attitude with regard to accepting the concept of self-responsibility of the

student and more liberal housing policies, and being more open to students studying controversial topics. Additionally, the study notes that parents were less willing to support the notions that communists organized demonstrations; that participants in peaceful demonstrations should be disaffiliated with the institution; and that parents should be involved in situations of unacceptable student behavior. The author notes that “the changes that occurred were consistent with the goals of the program” (p. 137) in that the program sought to keep open the lines of communication between the parents, students and the institution.

Structure

The structure of the program should be reflective of the goals of the institution (Coburn & Woodward, 2001). The literature suggests that the length of the programs vary significantly from institution to institution, but it is recommended that a program run concurrently with the student program in both day length and timeframe (Hatch, 2000). However, a thread that seems to run through most of the literature reviewed (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Hatch 2000; Mullendore, 1996) is the notion of separating the parents and students for most or all of the orientation experience. Austin (1997) suggests that “[t]he modeling in this format is solid: the family members will share in some of the student’s college life but not all of it” (p. 105).

The literature suggests various formats in presenting information to parents. Most often the use of speakers and panel presentations are used (Austin, 1997; Hatch, 2000). However, alternative presentation formats include skits (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001), role-plays (Austin, 1997; Puig, 1982), and videos (Austin, 1997).

In a qualitative study of orientation utilizing nine institutions in Pennsylvania, DeWitt (1984) discovered that all nine had a parent orientation component. Of those nine institutions, four offered a half-day program, two offered a one-day program, and two offered a one and one-half-day program, while only one institution offered a two-day program.

Components of the Parent Orientation Program

The components of the parent orientation program are described utilizing the four goal themes identified above.

Components that support educating parents about family transition issues.

Many parents feel that they are not provided with any assistance when learning how to adjust to their child leaving home for college. In particular Newman and Newman (1992) suggest that parents are “on [their] own as far as how to manage this major change..., how [they] understand what is happening for [their] college student, and how [they] understand [their] own feelings as the nature of [their] relationship with [their] child is transformed” (p. viii).

It is imperative that orientation address the issues involving separation and also provide a means by which parents learn how they can continue to be a part of their child’s life once they enter college (Austin, 1997). Hatch (2000) stresses the importance of beginning the orientation process prior to the student leaving home helps both student and parent begin the transition of dealing with separation and understanding the institution.

Including information such as the need for parents and students to create a new

mature relationship is beneficial to these sessions. This relationship should be a “renegotiated” one that is appropriate for the new phases into which both parents and students are entering (Austin, 1997). Parent orientation should encourage parents to have discussions with their students about the boundaries they are creating with their new relationship. In addition, the expectations between the two need also to be discussed and articulated (Mullendore, 1998).

These sessions can be presented in many formats. Typically they involve other parents or administrators who lead discussions with the parents regarding separation issues and letting go for both the parents and the students (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Hatch, 2000; Jacobs & With, 2002; Mullendore, 1998). These presentations can be made over lunch (Jacobs & With, 2002), by using panels (Hatch, 2000); at informal meetings such as a coffeehouse (Mullendore, 1998); or by utilizing skits or role-plays (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Puig, 1982). It is vital that parents have time to discuss separation issues on an informal basis with administrators and faculty. Parent orientation should create opportunities for these discussions to occur (Mullendore, 1998).

Parents want to hear information (testimonials) from other parents and students who have survived the first year of college. They need to see that students and parents succeed and experience pitfalls at varying levels (Hatch, 2000). At the University of Windsor (White, 1990), a panel of students and parents are utilized to offer suggestions on how parents can support their child and their role in their child’s transition. Having a session where the dean addresses parents to explain potential issues and changes in their

student and resources available on campus can be helpful in creating a comfort level with parents (Tederman, 1997).

One example of a session focusing on separation issues was conducted at West Chester State College. Puig (1982) utilized upper class students in telephone role-play situations to communicate phone calls that parents might expect to receive regarding transition issues. A similar session has been offered at Washington University where students perform skits consisting of typical phone calls home (Coburn & Woodward, 2001). A session focusing on the “freshman year for parents” (p. 6) was discussed in Jacobs & With’s (2002) study. In their study, parents found this session to be more beneficial than the other more traditional sessions offered at orientation.

A program was held at a parents orientation at Southern Illinois University that allowed parents to discuss changes they could see in their child as a result of college and to assist them in interpreting those changes (Stonewater, Stonewater, & Allen, 1983). Perry’s theory of intellectual development was utilized to explain how students move through intellectual stages of development. Parents were given ideas on how to respond to changes in their child using Perry’s model when their child demonstrated new ways of thinking that seemed opposed to the upbringing. Overall, the parents received and responded favorably to the information and felt it was beneficial in that it made the first year of college seem less threatening and more understandable.

Sessions devoted to parent expectations are very common. In DeWitt’s study (1984), six of the nine institutions surveyed offered a presentation on what parents can expect. Additionally, a question and answer session was scheduled at eight of the nine

institutions, ostensibly to deal with parent concerns and issues relating to the transition process.

Components that support providing parents with information, tools, and points of contact to support their student.

The sessions involved mostly relate to services and programs that the institution provides to support students on campus including health and counseling, academic support, career development, finances and financial aid, housing, food, campus involvement, and safety (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Mullendore, 1998). Typical formats involved with these sessions involve presenters representing the key areas and Mullendore (1998) notes that each presenter should identify to parents the level of involvement in each area that is desired and appropriate.

Health and wellness issues – It is important in these sessions to discuss what health services are available on campus (Mullendore, 1998); relay information regarding wellness and immunizations (Jacobs, 2002); and provide information on confidentiality issues and student health insurance (Mullendore, 1998).

Academic support – Institutions should provide information regarding academic expectations including policies, programs, and procedures (Austin, 1997); the flow of the academic year and choosing courses (Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1998); and how to acquire support outside the classroom for study skills, tutoring, study groups, and utilizing learning and writing centers (Hatch, 2000). Understanding the importance of their student garnering early assistance when lacking academic skills is a key concept to convey.

Parents need to understand the importance of the student-faculty relationship and how critical it is to the success of the student. Parents find it extremely rewarding to have a one on one meeting with their student's academic advisor. Additionally, having panel presentations utilizing academic advisors who articulate expectations and how they can be helpful in the academic process are favorably received. Also important to present to parents is the natural transition rhythm of the academic calendar and how their student might potentially respond. Issues such as when tests and registration occur should be covered (Hatch, 2000).

Career development – In this area orientation programs should focus on what parents need to know about choosing a major and what services are available to support career choice. Additionally, student employment opportunities should be discussed (Mullendore, 1998).

Finances and financial aid – Mullendore (1998) suggests that importance should be placed on supplying information about the costs associated with attending college (tuition, fees, books, housing, parking, etc.); options available for making payments for each, and also information regarding the type of financial assistance available.

Housing and food services – For parents it is important to stress the rules and regulations associated with residence life and also to address specific concerns parents may have about residence life (Hatch, 2000). Mullendore (1998) notes that resources available in housing and discussions regarding quality should also be offered.

Campus involvement opportunities – Parents should be educated about the various co-curricular opportunities available on campus including organizational involvement,

service learning, and leadership (Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1998). A concept to convey to parents is that the frequency and quality of a student's participation level in activities outside of the classroom has a positive impact on whether a student persists (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Safety – Safety on campus should be addressed by relaying information on campus police and security, proactive programs and services offered, and the limits on behavior (Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1998).

One very crucial tool provided to parents is that of a parent handbook (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001, Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1998). According to Austin (1997) the handbook should include “ a synthesized version of the student's handbook, capturing the central philosophic and conceptual foundations for the college's functioning. Key items for inclusion...are a calendar for the academic year, names and phone numbers of staff to whom family members can turn, a final exam schedule, and a glossary of academic terms and college-specific jargon” (p.107). This handbook serves as a key resource tool and guide once the parent has returned home (Mullendore, 1998).

Boyd, Hunt, Hunt, Magoon and Van Brunt (1997) discuss the use of a campus “resource directory” in parent orientation. Their study was conducted at a large public research university where two groups of parents were utilized to determine the effectiveness of a resource directory that is annually published by its counseling center. One group was given the directory and presented with information on its uses and need. In addition, a session was held that discussed the difference between helping their students do things and actually doing it for them. The control group was neither given the

directory nor participated in the discussion. Forty-three percent of those who returned surveys indicated that they had used the directory to assist their student. Although there were no significant differences between the students of the two groups in academic persistence, the students of the treatment group persisted in good academic standing in greater proportions than those of the control group. Equipping parents with information to act as referral agents had a positive impact on these first year students.

Components that support creating and defining the parent/institution relationship

The major components that support this goal involve showing parents that the institution has regard for their role in the student's life (Cohen, 1985; Hatch, 2000). The institution accomplishes this goal in several ways: by exposing parents to administrators in informal social settings (Mullendore, 1998); having key administrators host informational meetings that describe institutional profiles and parent/institutional relationships (Coburn & Woodward, 2001); and creating a means of future communications via newsletters and interactive web-sites (Coburn & Woodward, 2001).

Physically opening the campus via campus tours and open houses (Coburn & Woodward, 2001) helps parents to become connected to the campus and begin feeling a relationship with the institution. The campus tour allows parents to have a concrete image associated with the academic, social, and living arrangements their student will have on campus. If walking tours are not viable, a video tour can be substituted (Hatch, 2000).

What seems most important is that avenues of communication are opened between parents and the institution. Institutions do this by setting the tone at orientation and defining how they will communicate with parents regarding their students and what

to expect in the future (Coburn & Woodward, 2001). Sometimes the first interaction a parent receives after acceptance of their child to the institution is a request to donate funds to the college. It is important that the gap be filled between the two communications (Austin, 1997).

Also valuable in creating this relationship is to reinforce the connection parents have to their child. If the parents feel connected to the institution, Hatch (2000) suggests that parents feel that their familial relationships will continue. Knowing that they remain connected to their child through the institution can help parents feel as if they have a relationship with the institution (Coburn and Woodward, 2001). Parents need to understand the core values of the institution and to know that the institution cares about their child and them.

Another important aspect of parent orientation is that parents potentially can become institutional advocates. If the orientation process is a positive one for parents, they will work with their student to encourage persistence, because they, too, then have a stake in the institution (Mullendore, 1998). In addition, Cohen and Halsey (1985) state that more “informed and involved parents... share responsibility for the goals of the institution, ...[are] ambassadors and loyal supporters, ...[and] become donors” (p.95). *Components that support creating positive feelings in parents regarding their student’s choice of institution.*

Key to creating positive feelings for parents is alleviating anxiety and concerns about the institution (Hatch, 2000). In doing so, parents become more comfortable with the institution and what it has to offer their student. Mullendore (1998) suggests that a

key element throughout the entire parent orientation process should be making parents aware that there are resources available on campus to assist their child in all areas of life including academic, social, physical, and psychological. By doing just this, the parents then feel that the institution is committed to the success of their student (Austin, 1997). Therefore there should be a concerted effort on the part of the institution to communicate this message in all facets of the orientation program (Coburn & Woodward, 2001).

Additionally Austin (1997) notes that parents want to know that the institution cares about them as well. Communicating with parents and involving them in the orientation process helps to reinforce to the parents that they are valued members of the institutional community (Coburn & Woodward, 2001). Parents want to feel comfortable with the faculty and staff of the institution and will contribute favorably to the institution when they do so (Hatch, 2000).

Assessment of Parent Orientation Programs

There is almost no literature available that addresses how to assess a parent orientation program. It is important to assess a program, for as Terenzini and Upcraft (1996) note, determining the impact of a program and whether or not it has an impact on its participants is one of the most important questions we should ask.

Hatch (2000) suggests that parent orientation will be most effective in supporting the student orientation process when it adheres to the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS Standards). These standards call for a program that provides information to a student's primary support groups to include parents.

The CAS Standards (1998) state that an orientation program must: be based on

stated goals and objectives.

1. be coordinated with the relevant programs and activities of other institutional units.
2. be available to all students new to the institution.
3. assist new students in understanding the purposes of higher education and the mission of the institution.
4. assist new students in understanding their responsibilities within the educational setting.
5. provide new students with information about academic policies, procedures, requirements, and programs sufficient to make well-reasoned and well-informed choices.
6. inform new students about the availability of services and programs.
7. assist new students in becoming familiar with the campus and local environment.
8. provide intentional opportunities for new students to interact with faculty, staff, and continuing students.
9. provide new students with information and opportunities for self-assessment
10. provide relevant orientation information and activities to the new students' primary support groups (e.g. parents, guardians, spouses, children) (pp. 4-5).

Although the above criteria is directed toward the new student orientation program, the standards can apply to parents for one of the main reasons a parent orientation program exists is so that parents can support their child. If the parent program consists of

components similar to the student program, then parents theoretically are being given the information they need to support their child.

Assessment data can help institutions improve their programs and tailor them to the needs of those they serve. Holmes (1985) states that their program at San Diego State University is effective because they evaluate what does and does not work. Their evaluation allows them to modify their program each year and learn what the parents want and need. Additionally, Holmes states that the direction of the program will depend on the future evaluations and feedback they receive from the parent participants. White's (1990) article echoes the same sentiment. Evaluations at the University of Windsor support the institution's belief that they are meeting the needs of their parents. In this specific instance, they are effectively preparing families for the transition to college.

Data received from the parents at orientation programs can also provide insight into their perceptions and expectations. Austin & Sousa (1991) collected data from parents who attended orientation at Bentley College between 1987-1989. The data was collected prior to any interactions with the parents allowing for a more unbiased result. The researchers asked participants demographic information including gender, age, marital status, level of education, employment status, type of community (rural, suburban, urban), and distance the college is from home. These designations became the basis for their results. Generally the results were:

- Fathers feel the loss of their student more profoundly, although they express it more indirectly; reflect the cultural notion that men have more freedom to separate from their family of origin; and feel more concern for their own physical vulnerability.

- Parents who have not been to college are more apt to feel the loss of their student;
- Younger parents are more likely to strongly feel the loss and to envy the upcoming college experiences of their child;
- Eldest children are given more pressure to perform;
- Parents who have had prior experience with children living away are more confident of their child's social skills and readiness for college;
- Parents sending their first child to college feel the loss more significantly and are more apt to adopt the concept of in loco parentis as it relates to their child;
- Parents who rate their child as having high academic and/or social skills are seen as ready for separation and are more satisfied with their parenting role;
- Parents who rate their child as having low social and/or academic ability are more concerned for the success of their child and feel the loss of their child more profoundly;
- Parents, in general, have faith in the ability of their child to be successful, but also indicate a desire to remain in control of their child's life as they enter college.

Summary

In summary, the literature review shows that:

- parents serve a critical role in supporting their child during the transition to college (Adams, Ryan, and Keating, 2000; Brooks and DuBois, 1995; Hickman, Bartholomae, and McKenry, 2000; Kenny and Donaldson, 1991; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Larsen, Jacobs, 1997; Lapsley, Rice and FitzGerald, 1990; Taub, 1997; Wintre and Sugar, 2000; Wintre and Yaffe,

2000);

- parents serve as retention agents for students in college (Austin, 1997; Boyd, 1997; Cohen, 1985; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Hatch, 2000; Mallickrodt, 1988; Mann, 1998; Mullendore, 1998; Perigo, 1985; Scott & Daniel, 2001; Upcraft & Farnsworth, 1984)
- parental involvement and support are crucial for student success (Austin, 1997; Boyd, Hunt, P, Hunt, S, Magoon, Van Brunt, 1997; Coburn & Woodward 2001; Dodge, 1990; Hatch, 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Jacobs & With, 2002; Kenny & Donaldson, 1992; Mullendore, 1998; Newman & Newman, 1992; Perigo, 1985; Tederman, 1997; Trusty, 2001; Wintre & Sugar, 2000; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000);
- the goals for parent orientation are educating parents about the family transition (Austin, 1997; Coburn and Woodward, 2001; Hatch 2000; Jacobs & With, 2002; Mullendore 1996); providing parents with information, tools, and points of contact to support their student (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward 2001; Hadlock, 2000; Hatch 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985); creating and defining the parent/institutional relationship (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985; Scott & Daniel, 2001; Tederman, 1997; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, Ward-Roof, 2000); and creating positive feelings regarding their child's institution of choice (Austin, 1997; Coburn and Woodward, 2001; Jacobs, 2002;

Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985);

- the structure of the program should be reflective of the goals of the institution and include a wide variety of formats (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Hatch 2000; Mullendore, 1996);
- the components of the program include sessions that educate parents about family transition issues (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; DeWitt, 1994; Hatch, 2000; Jacobs & With, 2002; Mullendore, 1998; Newman, 1992; Puig, 1982; Stonewater, Stonewater, & Allen, 1983; Tederman, 1997; White, 1990); sessions that provide parents with tools to support their child (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward 2001; Hadlock, 2000; Hatch 2000; Jacobs, 2002; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985); sessions that define the parent/institutional relationship (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985; Scott & Daniel, 2001; Tederman, 1997; Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, Ward-Roof, 2000); and sessions that create positive feelings regarding their child's institution of choice (Austin, 1997; Coburn and Woodward, 2001; Jacobs, 2002; Mullendore, 1996; Perigo, 1985); and
- assessment of parent orientation programs should adhere to the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) (Hatch, 2000); is essential to provide the program that parents want and need (Holmes, 1985; White, 1990); and assists in determining expectations of parents (Austin & Sousa, 1991)

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND COLLECTION OF DATA

Population and Sampling Procedures

The instrument was administered to all parents at all seven orientation sessions who attended the closing breakfast of the Parent Orientation program during summer 2002. The attendance of the entire parent orientation program was 1,240 parents. The attendance at the closing breakfast was 811. All parents who attended the closing breakfast were asked to participate in the survey.

Data Collection

A written survey was constructed for the research questions of this study as outlined above. A group of parent orientation experts were utilized to review the instrument to determine content validity and internal consistency. These experts were asked to provide feedback regarding the survey. The experts were Diane Austin, Dean of Students at Lasell College; Ralph Busby, Director of Counseling and Career Services at Stephen F. Austin State University; Dan Nadler, Associate Dean of Students at Tulane University; Denise Rode, Director of Orientation, Northern Illinois University; and Jeanine Ward-Roof, Director of Student Development Services at Clemson University. Their suggestions for revisions were incorporated into the instrument and then returned to them for further verification. The final instrument reflected changes and suggestions made by the panel after the second revision.

Since there are seven separate sessions of the UNT program, the instrument was administered on seven different occasions. These sessions occurred on June 21, July 12, July 16, July 19, July 23, July 26, and July 30 all in 2002. The survey contained a cover letter where the parent participants were notified of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and the option to not participate.

The participants were surveyed at the closing breakfast of each orientation session. Parent orientation participants were notified at the beginning of each three-day session of the opportunity to participate in a research study on the final day of the session. Additionally they were reminded twice during the second day of the session of the survey to be administered at breakfast the next day. At each of these occasions parent orientation participants were also notified of the ability to not participate by simply not completing the survey. Parents who did not attend the final breakfast were not able to complete the survey.

Copies of the instrument, including the cover letter, were placed at each participant's seat at breakfast. During the opening announcements brief instructions were provided as to how to complete the instrument. Additionally, collection of the instruments was also discussed. Monitors throughout the room were identified to assist in collection, a box was provided at the door for participants to drop their surveys in, and finally, they could simply leave the survey at the table to be collected at the conclusion of the breakfast.

Procedure for Analysis of Data

Every survey item was assigned a numerical value with the resulting data being

both nominal and ordinal in nature. The first step in the analysis of the data was to recode the survey data. Originally the value of “No Opinion” was zero and was placed next to the “Strongly Agree” response, which carried a weight of one. In order to accurately reflect the true value of “No Opinion” as the middle value of the responses, the values of each response were changed to a five point Likert scale. The values assigned were 5 for “Strongly Agree”; 4 for “Agree”; 3 for “No Opinion”; 2 for “Disagree”, and 1 for “Strongly Disagree”. The responses where participants failed to offer an answer on a particular question have been categorized as “No Opinion” and assigned a value of 3.

Additionally, the categories that were not already dichotomous were made so. The race category was quantified with Caucasian/White as non-minority and with all other categories of racial status (African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American, American Indian [Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian], and other) as minority. For educational background the dichotomous breakdown was from some high school experience to some college experience for the first category and from associate’s degree to doctoral degree for the second. Finally, for miles away from home the two values were fifty or fewer miles from campus and greater than fifty miles from campus.

A t-Test was utilized to analyze the data because it is designed to compare the means of the same variable with two different groups. A pooled t-Test was utilized when the variance for the two groups being compared were seen as normally distributed, and therefore, equal. If not, a Satterwaite t-Test was run to account for the unequal variances. In this case, sixteen t-Tests were run to analyze the four research questions utilizing the

four categories in each. SAS 10.0 for Windows software was used to set up the database and analyze the data.

Testing of Research Questions

The data for the study was collected and analyzed according to the research questions posed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Some information collected was descriptive data. Demographic information is reported first, followed by an analysis of the questions on the instrument related to the research questions.

Research Question 1: Is there a difference between the perceived value of parent orientation by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas?

Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety), Q-4 (more knowledgeable about UNT's expectations), Q-8 (speakers are knowledgeable and competent), Q-11 (better understanding of parental role), Q-14 (better understanding of student experience), Q18 (UNT regard for continued parental involvement), Q-27 (assistance with student's transition to college), and Q31 (recommend orientation to others) all address the research question of perceived value. The values for these questions were summed and divided by the population and a *t*-test was conducted with the resulting data analyzed at the .05 level of significance to determine the average for each population studied (gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from UNT).

Research Question 2: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel they are adequately equipped with the tools and information they need about

UNT to be able to support their son/daughter in college?

Q-2 (adequate points of contact), Q-5 (resources for career development), Q-9 (contact for housing), Q-10 (opportunity to meet with key administrators), Q-12 (participation of faculty), Q-15 (usefulness of parent handbook), Q-19 (services for illnesses), Q-20 (financial aid), Q-23 (contacts to assist with resolving future problems), Q-24 (psychological counseling), Q-25 (information to become informed partner), and Q-28 (information on academic support programs) address the research question of whether parents feel adequately equipped with tools to assist in supporting their child in college. The values for these questions were summed and divided by the population and a t-test was conducted with the resulting data analyzed at the .05 level of significance to determine the average for each population studied (gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from UNT).

Research Question 3: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel informed about the relationship and family changes that will likely occur due to their child attending college?

Q-6 (UNT supportive of students and parents during transition), Q-16 (time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff), Q-21 (information on transition issues), and Q-26 (exploration of transition with parents and students) address the issue of changing family relationships. The values for these questions were summed and divided by the population and a t-test was conducted with the resulting data analyzed at the .05 level of significance to determine the average for each population studied (gender, minority

status, educational background, and distance of home from UNT).

Research Question 4: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance from home of the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel as if they have established a positive relationship with the University of North Texas?

Q-3 (UNT will provide quality education), Q-7 (parent is partner with UNT), Q-13 (UNT cares about student), Q-17 (UNT provides supportive environment), Q-22 (parent is part of UNT community), Q-29 (UNT education will be meaningful), and Q-30 (feel welcome at UNT) address the issue of positive institutional/parent relationship. The values for these questions were summed and divided by the population and a t-test was conducted with the resulting data analyzed at the .05 level of significance to determine the average for each population studied (gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from UNT).

Additional data analysis was conducted to focus on the issue of quality, as noted in the significance of the study, even though this issue is not a specific research question. The average means of each question were ranked to determine which areas the participants ranked higher. An analysis was also made using the total of Q-1-Q-31 with Q-32 (rating quality on scale of one to ten). The purpose of this analysis was to contribute more to the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations of the study's four research questions in the evaluation of the parent orientation program at the University of North Texas.

Expected Results

Research Question 1: Is there a difference between the perceived value of parent orientation by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas?

It is expected that there will be little or no difference by gender, non-minority vs. minority, and educational background. However, there is an expectation of a higher difference for those parents who live farther away from the institution than those who reside within fifty miles of the campus.

Research Question 2: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel they are adequately equipped with the tools and information they need about UNT to be able to support their son/daughter in college?

It is expected that more parents who live farther away from campus will feel that they are not as equipped to support their child in college than parents who live closer. There is little expected difference between the parents in the other three categories.

Research Question 3: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel informed about the relationship and family changes that will likely occur due to their child attending college?

It is expected that the only difference will occur between parents who live closer to campus and those who live farther away.

Research Question 4: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational

background, and distance from home of the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel as if they have established a positive relationship with the University of North Texas?

It is expected that there will be no difference between any of the categories.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Sample

A total of 811 parents attended the closing breakfast on the final day for the seven sessions. Of those, 736 completed the instrument for a 90.7% response rate.

The demographics of the participants were as follows:

Gender

Of the 730 participants reporting gender, 68.49% indicated female, while 31.51% indicated male.

Table 1

Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Females	500	68.49
Males	230	31.51

Frequency Missing = 6

Minority Status

The large majority of participants at parent orientation are white. Of the 727 respondents, 593 indicated they were Caucasian. The least represented populations are Native American (6) and Other (6). The ethnicity breakdown was 8.25% for African-Americans, 1.38% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 81.57% for Caucasian, 7.15% for Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American, 0.83% for Native American (Indian, Alaskan,

Hawaiian), and 0.83% for Other.

Table 2

Minority Status

Minority Status	Frequency	Percent
African-American	60	8.25
Asian/Pacific Islander	10	1.38
Caucasian/White	593	81.57
Hispanic/Latin/Mexican American	52	7.15
Native American (Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian)	6	0.83
Other	6	0.83

Frequency Missing = 9

For the purposes of this study the minority status category was made dichotomous. Thus, the two values are reflected as Non-Minority (Caucasian/White) representing 81.57%, while the Minority (all other ethnicity categories) represents 18.43%.

Table 3

Minority Status (Dichotomous)

Minority-Status	Frequency	Percent
Non-Minority	593	81.57
Minority	134	18.43

Frequency Missing = 9

Educational Background

The educational background category was divided into eight sections. Participants ranged from some high school experience through a terminal college degree. Most (297)

of the 704 respondents to this question had achieved a bachelor's degree. While the fewest, 8, were at the lowest category having only completed some high school.

Table 4

Educational Background

Educational Background	Frequency	Percent
Completed some high school	8	1.14
Completed GED	10	1.42
Graduated from high school	57	8.10
Completed some college	163	23.15
Have an associate's degree	52	7.39
Have a bachelor's degree	297	42.19
Have a master's degree	99	14.06
Have a doctoral degree	18	2.56

Frequency Missing = 32

Overall the participants at parent orientation were a highly educated group. Of the 704 participants who responded to educational background, the majority (66.19%) indicated upper level education, i.e., an associate's degree or above.

Table 5

Educational Background (Dichotomous)

Educational Background	Frequency	Percent
Some college and below	238	33.81
Associate's degree and above	466	66.19

Frequency Missing = 32

Miles from UNT

Of the parents who attended orientation, 74.53% indicated that they reside over 50 miles from campus. The other 25.47% responded they lived within 50 miles of the UNT campus.

Table 6

Miles from UNT

Miles from UNT	Frequency	Percent
Reside within 50 miles of campus	177	25.47
Reside over 50 miles from campus	518	74.53

Frequency Missing = 41

Research Questions

Research Question 1 Asked: Is there a difference between the perceived value of parent orientation by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas?

On the issue of value by gender, both females and males rated the value of parent orientation highly with means of 35.802 and 34.809 respectively from a maximum score of 40. A t-test analysis among gender indicates there is a statistically significant difference (Alpha 0.0016) in the perception of value between females and males. Overall females had a higher appreciation for the value of parent orientation.

A t-test run on each individual question showed a statistically significant difference on six of the eight questions in this category. The questions are Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety), Q-4 (more knowledgeable about UNT's expectations), Q-8 (speakers are competent and knowledgeable), Q-11 (better understanding of parental

role), Q-18 (showed regard for continued parental involvement), and Q-27 (assistance with student's transition to college). In all six cases, females scored significantly higher than males indicating women found more value in the parent orientation than their male counterparts.

Table 7

Value by Gender

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Females	500	35.802	3.921
Males	230	34.809	3.957

When examining minority status as it relates to the perceived value of orientation, both Minority and Non-Minority participants felt equally strong. The mean for Non-Minority was 35.445 as compared to that of Minority at 35.784. A statistical analysis showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Although there were no statistically significant differences by category, there was one question of the eight that indicated statistically significant difference between Minority and Non-Minority participants. The mean for Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety) shows a value of 4.3881 for Minority participants and 4.231 for Non-Minority participants indicating that Non-Minorities felt less anxious about their student attending college after attending parent orientation.

Table 8

Value by Minority Status

Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Minority	593	35.445	4.022
Minority	134	35.784	3.520

A statistically significant difference at the .05 Alpha level was found when comparing the two educational background categories in terms of value. Those participants who had less education found the value of orientation to be statistically significantly more important than those with more education.

Four questions specifically showed a statistically significant difference. Most predominant was Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety) where those with less education scored a mean of 4.4076 while those with more education scored a mean of 4.1738. Statistical analysis of this one question showed a statistically significant difference at Alpha <.0001. Anxiety was alleviated significantly for those participants who had an education level of some college and below.

Additionally, Q-27 (assistance with student's transition to college) also scored a significant difference at the .0009 Alpha level. Once again those with less education also found orientation to be more valuable in this regard. Other questions, Q-11 (better understanding of parental role) and Q-31 (recommend orientation to others) also showed statistically significant differences with more importance given by those with less education.

Table 9

Value by Educational Background

Educational Background	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Some college and below	238	35.916	3.5211
Associate's degree and above	466	35.232	4.1939

Both of those participants who live within 50 miles of UNT and those who do not, found value in the parent orientation program. The mean of those who live within 50 miles was high at 34.814, but not as high as that of those who live greater than 50 miles away, 35.66. A t-test indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups indicating that distance from home does have an impact on perceived value. The participants who lived farther away found the parent orientation program to be more valuable to them than those who lived closer.

Three questions in particular, accounted for this statistically significant difference. Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety) had a stronger mean for those who live farther away from UNT at 4.2876 than the mean for those who live closer of 4.1525. Also significant in this category were Q-14 (better understanding of what student will experience) and Q-18 (showed regard for continued parental involvement) with those living farther from UNT having the higher mean.

Table 10

Value by Miles from UNT

Miles from UNT	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reside within 50 miles of campus	177	34.814	4.5043
Reside over 50 miles from campus	518	35.660	3.7859

Research Question 2 asked: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel they are adequately equipped with the tools and information they need about UNT to be able to support their son/daughter in college?

Both males and females felt they were adequately equipped with tools to support their son or daughter. The female mean was 51.95 and the male mean was 50.465. A t-test indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups at the .05 Alpha level indicating that females felt considerably more equipped than males to be supportive. Therefore, the *tools* supplied at orientation proved to be more beneficial to females than to males.

Six questions of the twelve in this category contributed to the overall statistically significance difference by gender. The highest difference was seen on Q-25 (information to become an informed partner) where females had a mean of 4.39 and males had a mean of 4.213 and statistical analysis indicated a statistically significant difference of .0005 Alpha. Q-10 (opportunities to meet with key administrators), Q-12 (participation of faculty), Q-23 (contacts to assist with resolving future problems) and Q-24

(psychological counseling) and Q-28 (information on academic support programs) also had statistically significant differences with females having the higher mean in all cases.

Table 11

Equipped with Tools by Gender

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Females	500	51.95	5.6949
Males	230	50.465	5.7111

While both Minority and Non-Minority participants felt strongly equipped to be supportive as indicated by their high means, 51.709 and 51.455 respectively, the difference was not statistically different.

Although there was no statistically significant difference by category there was only one question within the category that indicated significant difference. Q-15 (usefulness of parent handbook) had a mean for Non-Minority at 4.3727 and a mean for Minority at 4.5075. Minority participants evidently found the parent handbook to be more important as a tool to help support their son or daughter than did Non-Minority participants.

Table 12

Equipped with Tools by Minority Status

Status	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Minority	593	51.455	5.7462
Minority	134	51.709	5.556

Those participants who had obtained at least an associate's degree felt that they were equipped to be supportive to their child. The possible maximum score for this section was 60 and this mean was 51.472. However, those with less education also felt well equipped with a mean score of 51.366. A t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the two. Additionally, there were no individual questions within this category that identified a statistically significant difference.

Table 13

Equipped with Tools by Educational Background

Educational Background	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Some college and below	238	51.366	5.5633
Associate's degree and above	466	51.472	5.9057

Both dichotomous values with distance over 50 miles from UNT and 50 miles and closer, found they were well equipped to support their child in college. The mean for those who lived closer to UNT was 50.497 and the mean for those who lived farther away was 51.726. Statistical analysis showed a statistically significant difference between the two categories at the .05 Alpha level. Those parents who lived farther away felt the *tools* they received at orientation prepared them more to support their son or daughter than those parents who lived closer.

Several questions within this category highlight the differences found. Q-9 (contact for housing) showed a difference with those living farther away from UNT feeling stronger about the housing contact information than those who live closer with means of 4.3533 and 4.1582 respectively. Q-10 (opportunities to meet with key

administrators), Q-12 (participation of faculty), Q-19 (services for illnesses) and Q-25 (information to become informed partner) all noted higher means for those parents who resided more than 50 miles away from campus.

Table 14

Equipped with Tools by Miles from UNT

Miles from UNT	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reside within 50 miles of campus	177	50.497	6.036
Reside over 50 miles from campus	518	51.726	5.7385

Research Question 3 Asked: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance of home from the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel informed about the relationship and family changes that will likely occur due to their child attending college?

Gender proved to be a factor with respect to transition and family changes. Both males and females felt they were well informed with means of 17.074 and 17.552 respectively. However, statistical analysis showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups in that females felt more strongly about being informed of changing family and relationship issues that would likely occur during college.

Three of the four questions in this category showed statistically significant differences. Q-16 (time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff), Q-21 (information on transition issues) and Q-26 (exploration of transition with parents and students) each showed females had higher means on all occasions.

Table 15

Changing Relationships by Gender

Gender	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Females	500	17.552	2.1318
Males	230	17.074	2.0957

These data indicate that both Minority and Non-Minority participants felt strongly about the information they received regarding changing family relationships. The means for both were high given the maximum score for this category was 20. The Non-Minority mean was 17.428 while the Minority mean was 17.321. However, a t-test showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups and there were no individual questions within this category that showed significant difference.

Table 16

Changing Relationships by Minority Status

Status	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Minority	593	51.455	5.7462
Minority	134	51.709	5.556

For educational background, both subgroups had high means indicating they felt informed about the changing family relationship to come with a child entering college. The mean for those who had a lower level of education was 17.433 and the mean for those who had a higher level of education was 17.399. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Additionally, statistical analysis of each question individually did not find any questions with significant statistical differences.

Table 17

Changing Relationships by Educational Background

Educational Background	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Some college and below	238	17.433	2.0851
Associate's degree and above	466	17.399	2.1189

The distance a parent lives from UNT has a significant impact on how informed the parent felt about the relationship and family changes that might likely occur. The mean for parents who lived closer to UNT was 17.051 while the mean for those who lived over 50 miles away was 17.519. A t-test indicated a statistically significant difference at the .05 Alpha level. Therefore, those parents who lived farther away felt more informed about these transition and separation issues.

Two of the four questions in this category identified statistically significant differences. Q-16 (time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff) had a mean of 3.9492 for those who lived within 50 miles of UNT and 4.112 for those participants who lived farther away. Also Q-21 (information on transition issues) showed that parents who lived farther felt more strongly about transition issues with a mean of 4.4556 as compared to those who lived closer with a mean at 4.2938.

Table 18

Changing Relationships by Miles from UNT

Miles from UNT	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reside within 50 miles of campus	177	17.051	2.3676
Reside over 50 miles from campus	518	17.519	2.016

Research Question 4 Asked: Are there differences by gender, minority status, educational background, and distance from home of the University of North Texas as to whether parents feel as if they have established a positive relationship with the University of North Texas?

More females, with a mean of 31.442, felt that they had established a positive relationship with the university than did males, whose mean were 30.874. Statistical analysis indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Individual questions that contributed to this finding are Q-7 (parent is partner with UNT) and Q-22 (parent is part of the community). Q-7 shows a mean for females of 4.452 and a mean for males of 4.3261. For Q-22, females had a mean of 4.15 while the mean for males was 3.9957.

Table 19

Positive Relationship with UNT by Gender

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Females	500	31.442	3.2839
Males	230	30.874	3.2864

Minority status did not have a statistically significant impact as to whether parents felt they had established a positive relationship with UNT during orientation. Both Non-Minority and Minority means were high, 31.233 and 31.445 respectively, with a maximum score of 35. These high means indicate that both subgroups felt that they had established a strong partnership with the institution. However, statistical analysis did not show significant difference between the two groups nor was there difference on an individual question within this category.

Table 20

Positive Relationship with UNT by Minority Status

Status	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-Minority	593	31.233	3.3369
Minority	134	31.445	2.9701

Both subgroups by educational background felt they had established a strong relationship with UNT during parent orientation. The group with some college and less educational experience had a mean of 31.416 while the group with at least an associate's degree had a mean of 31.472. Both means are high and illustrate feelings of a positive relationship. However, statistical analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between the two categories.

Although no statistically significant differences were found by category, one question within the category did show a statistically significant difference. Q-7 (parent is partner with UNT) had a mean of 4.437 for those parents with a lower education and a mean of 4.4013 for those parents with a higher education. Those parents with a more

limited education felt more strongly that they are partners with the institution as a result of attending parent orientation.

Table 21

Positive Relationship with UNT by Educational Background

Educational Background	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Some college and below	238	31.416	3.1901
Associate's degree and above	466	31.445	3.373

Those parents who lived fewer than 50 miles from campus felt they had established a strong relationship with UNT evidenced by the mean score of 30.921. Similarly, parents who lived greater than 50 miles from UNT also felt a strong positive relationship with a mean of 31.338. A t-test showed there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

In this category however, there was one question that showed a statistically significant difference. Q-17 (UNT provides supportive environment) was felt more strongly by parents who lived farther away from UNT. The mean for those living within 50 miles of campus was 4.322 and for those living greater than 50 miles away it was 4.4479. This is statistically significant at the .0174 alpha level.

Table 22

Positive Relationship with UNT by Miles from UNT

Miles from UNT	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reside within 50 miles of campus	177	30.921	3.5539
Reside over 50 miles from campus	518	31.338	3.2717

To address the issue of quality an analysis was conducted on the average means of each question and ranking them in order. This analysis showed that the average mean of all questions (Q1-Q-31) was 4.37, illustrating that most respondents felt all four issues increased (perceived value, equipped with tools, knowledgeable transition issues, and establishment of a positive relationship with the institution) in value. In fact, of the 31 items on the survey, 20 were above the mean and only 11 were below the mean. The range of scores was from 4.679 to 3.823. There were no average items that fell below the “No Opinion” scale of 3. The median score was 4.41.

The top five rated responses were to Q-31 (recommend attendance to other new UNT parents), mean of 4.679; Q-30 (feel welcome at UNT), mean of 4.633; Q-3 (UNT will provide quality education), mean of 4.581; Q-29 (UNT education will be meaningful), mean of 4.563; and Q-12 (participation of faculty), mean of 4.562.

The lowest five rated responses were to Q-20 (financial aid), mean of 3.823; Q-24 (psychological counseling), mean of 3.986; Q-16 (time to discuss transition issues with faculty and staff), mean of 4.070; Q-22 (parents are part of UNT community), mean of 4.099; and Q-19 (services for illness), mean of 4.139. Although on the bottom of the chart, these means still reflect a very high satisfactory opinion from the respondents.

Table 23

Mean and Rank of Each Survey Question

Rank	Mean	Question	Question Description
1	4.67935	31	Recommend orientation to others
2	4.63315	30	Feel welcome at UNT
3	4.58152	3	UNT will provide quality education
4	4.56386	29	UNT education will be meaningful
5	4.56250	12	Participation of faculty important
6	4.53397	13	UNT cares about education of child
7	4.52853	8	Presenters/speakers are competent
8	4.51630	2	Provided adequate points of contact
9	4.48505	4	More knowledgeable about expectations of student
10	4.47690	6	UNT will be supportive through transition
11	4.43614	26	PO gave info on transition issues
12	4.42527	17	UNT will provide supportive environment
13	4.41984	14	Have understanding of what student will experience
14	4.41576	21	Provided info on separation and transition
15	4.41440	5	Know resources for career
16	4.41033	7	Partner with UNT
17	4.39266	15	Parent handbook useful tool
18	4.38451	27	Know role of assisting student with transition
19	4.38315	11	Assist with student transition
20	4.38179	28	Info on academic support programs
21	4.34647	18	Showed regard for continued parental involvement
22	4.33560	25	Info to become informed partner in student's education
23	4.31793	10	Opportunities to meet with key administrators
24	4.30707	9	Contact for housing
25	4.28261	23	Know who to contact should problem arise
26	4.25543	1	Has helped alleviate anxiety
27	4.13995	19	Services in case of illness
28	4.09918	22	Feel part of the community
29	4.07065	16	Time to discuss issues with fac/staff
30	3.98641	24	Contact for counseling
31	3.82337	20	Questions about Fin Aid answered

Some parents chose to provide comments and remarks directly on their survey instrument. Most of the comments provided specific feedback regarding parent orientation and were positive in nature. They expressed appreciation for the efforts of the university and the personnel involved. Some comments were negative and collectively addressed shortening the time frame of the session and expressed a desire to have more contact with their student and the advising process. These comments are listed in their entirety in Appendix E.

Summary of Findings

1. The survey population of 736 participants consisted of: 68.49% female, 31.51% male; 81.57% Non-Minority, 18.43% Minority; 33.81% had experience at the college level or lower, 66.19% had an associate's degree or above; and 25.47% resided within 50 miles of campus, 74.53% resided over 50 miles from UNT.
2. On the issue of the perceived value of parent orientation, there were statistically significant differences by gender, educational background and distance from home. There were no statistically significant differences by minority status or educational background.
3. There were statistically significant differences by gender and distance from home for whether parents felt adequately equipped to support their son/daughter in college. No statistically significant differences were found by minority status or educational background.

4. Gender and distance from home were statistically significant factors associated with parents feeling informed about the relationship or family changes that might likely occur during college. Minority status and educational background did not show any difference.
5. The only area showing statistically significant difference in regards to establishing a positive relationship with the institution was by gender. Minority status, educational background and distance from home showed no statistically significant differences.
6. The average mean for all questions was 4.37 indicating a high degree of parent perceived value from attendance at UNT's Parent Orientation program. Conclusions, discussion, and recommendations for the profession and future research are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the perceived value of the parent orientation program at the University of North Texas to the parents who participate in it. An instrument to assess of the accomplishment of the UNT parent program's educational goals was formulated using information gained from a comprehensive analysis of the literature. The research questions therein were designed to determine if there was a balance of valuable experiences between all of the participants. Both Holmes (1985) and White (1990) indicate the importance of developing an assessment tool to ensure that a program is meeting the perceived needs of the participants and the educational goals of the institution.

Hence, more specifically, the study attempted to measure the attainment of four separate educational goals of the program. The first was to determine if parents perceived personal value from attending the parent orientation program. The second was whether parents felt that they had enough information about the institution to adequately support their student through the college transition. Third, the study sought to ascertain whether parents felt informed about relationship and transitional issues that would likely occur during college. And fourth, the study sought to determine whether parents felt that they had established a positive relationship with the institution.

Constructs were drawn from the literature to create the instrument. Similar items were grouped together and became the basis for the four separate research questions. These groups were labeled as value, tools, transition, and positive relationship. Each research question then identified three dichotomous subgroups of participants by which to analyze the construct. These subgroups were gender, minority status, and distance of home from UNT. A panel of experts evaluated the initial draft of the survey. Their recommendations were incorporated into the final assessment instrument used for this study.

The survey was administered to all parents who participated in the final breakfast session at each of the seven orientation sessions. The overall survey response rate was 90.7%, which reflected 736 usable surveys.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive analysis showed that 68.49% of the participants were female, while 31.51% were male. Slightly more than eighty percent (81.57%) of the participants identified themselves as non-minority and 18.43% identified themselves as minority. The majority, 66.19%, of the participants possessed at least an associate's degree, while 33.81% indicated only some experience at the college level or lower. Finally, most of the parents, 74.53%, lived farther than fifty miles from UNT's campus, and 25.47% resided within fifty miles of UNT.

Inferential statistical analyses were used to compare the means of each of the four subgroups of participants for each of the four research questions. On the question of value, all subgroups had high means indicating that collectively all participants' felt the

parent orientation program had value. Females had a statistically higher mean, 35.802 than that of the males, 34.809. Statistical analyses showed no significant difference between the subgroups according to minority and non-minority status. Both subgroups had equally strong means with the minority participants having 35.445 compared to that of Non-Minority at 35.784. By educational level, those participants with less education found significantly more value than did those with higher levels of education. The means for lower levels of education and higher levels of education were 35.916 and 35.232 respectively. Additionally, there were statistically significant differences between those who lived closer to UNT and those who lived farther away. Those living farther than fifty miles from campus found significantly more value in the program with a mean of 35.660, than did those living closer with a mean of 34.814.

While both males and females felt adequately equipped with tools to support their son or daughter in college, females had a significantly higher mean, 51.95, than did males, 50.465. Once again, both Non-Minority and Minority participants felt strongly equipped, but in this instance, there was no statistically significant difference between the two subgroups. There were also no statistically significant differences between the subgroups according to level of education although both felt adequately prepared to assist their son or daughter. The mean for those with higher levels of education was 51.472 and it was 51.366 for those with lower levels of education. Those participants who lived farther than fifty miles from UNT felt significantly more prepared with tools to support their child with a mean of 51.726 than those who lived closer with a mean of 50.497.

Females felt significantly more informed about family and relationship transitions

than did their male counterparts. Both females and males felt well informed as indicated by their means 17.552 and 17.074 respectively. Although both Minority and Non-Minority groups felt highly informed of transitional issues, there was no statistically significant difference between the two means, 17.321 for Minority and 17.428 for Non-Minority. Educational level also indicated no statistically significant impact on the issue of transition. Those participants who had a lower level of education scored at a mean of 17.433 while those with a higher level of education had a mean of 17.399. The high means of both groups suggest that each subgroup felt parent orientation provided good information about the transition to college. However, the distance parents lived from UNT proved to be statistically significant in how informed about family changes they felt. Those who lived farther from UNT (17.519) felt more informed than those who lived closer (17.051).

All participants felt similarly that they had all established a positive relationship with UNT through their participation in the parent orientation program. Females, with a mean of 31.442, felt more strongly about their relationship with the university than did the males, who had a mean of 30.874. Minority status did not have an impact as to whether parents felt they established a positive relationship. Minority parents had a mean of 31.445 while Non-Minority parents scored a mean of 31.223. Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between the subgroups according to educational background. Those with more education scored a mean of 31.472 while those who have some college or less scored a mean of 31.416. Finally, those who lived closer to UNT had a mean of 30.921 in regard to establishing a positive relationship with the institution.

Parents who lived farther than fifty miles from UNT had a mean of 31.338. Statistical analysis showed no statistically significant difference regarding distance from home and feelings of a positive relationship with the institution.

Overall, the quality of the program was perceived to be high by parent participants with an average mean of all questions at 4.37 on a 5.0 scale. Parent participants felt all four issues raised (perceived value, equipped with tools, knowledgeable of transition issues, and positive relationship with the institution) were positive. In ranking the questions, twenty fell above the mean. The lowest satisfaction mean for any question was a relatively high, 3.823/5.0.

Discussion

Value

Involvement of parents is integral to the successful transition of students (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Parent Orientation provides a systematic and planned approach for parents to have a greater influence on the success of new students.

The literature identified four themes relating to the goals of parent orientation. These themes are educating parents about the family transition; providing parents with tools and points of contact to support their student; creating and defining the parent/institutional relationship; and creating positive feelings regarding their child's institution of choice. Therefore, through the literature, these are the attributes by which a parent orientation program is seen to have value or worth.

Although there were no specific studies available regarding gender, it was expected that no difference between gender would be found. However, just the opposite

occurred in the study. Statistically significant differences were found between females and males with females having a higher regard for the value of parent orientation. Of the eight questions identified in the instrument to test for value, six of them showed a statistically significant difference by gender. This finding may suggest that women feel more strongly about a child coming to college than does a male. Furthermore, females may perceive a greater return from their time invested in a parent orientation program than do males.

Overall, the fact that more women than men are involved in presenting directly to the parents in UNT's program may partially explain the difference in perception of value. The coordinator for almost all sessions of parent orientation was female. Additionally, the majority of the speakers, including those at lunch and leading the academic overview, were female. Leading to this observation were the fact that Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety), Q-8 (speakers are more competent and knowledgeable), Q-11 (better understanding of parental role), and Q-18 (showed regard for continued parental involvement) all showed a significant difference by gender. Females obviously felt less anxiety after attending orientation than did their male counterparts. Having two females share their personal experiences of having children in college could also be directly related to this difference. These female presenters could have been seen as role models for the females illustrating for them their future role and involvement levels with their child. While there were males presenting and in leadership roles within orientation, no males formally shared personal experiences of supporting a child through college. Males may not have had that same connection based upon the difference in gender.

The issue of value showed no significant difference by Minority status, just as expected. This finding may be the result of the diversity of presenters involved with orientation as well as the perceived open and welcoming environment of the campus.

One question related to value did show a statistically significant difference by minority status, Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety). This difference might be the result of Minority participants having greater anxiety before attending orientation and finding relief from this anxiety from their program experience. The program must have met the needs of this population to help them feel more comfortable with the institution. Once again, the diversity of presenters and the perceived welcoming environment could have contributed to this feeling. Additionally, there was diversity of orientation leaders as well. This diversity may have also diminished their anxiety in that their sons and daughters had peer mentors available to assist them through their college experience.

An unanticipated result was finding a difference between educational levels in regard to value. Nothing in the literature specifically addresses value, however the research conducted by Austin and Sousa (1991) indicating parents who do not have college experience tend to experience more feelings of loss, may be a reason for the finding.

Additionally, these less educated parents may feel more comfortable with having some experience on a college campus. Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety) was a question where a statistically significant difference between the groups was found at an extremely high level ($\alpha < .0001$). Having this experience and spending time in the collegiate environment may have been much more valuable to this population in that they feel less

anxious having eliminated some of the fear of the unknown.

Another key question of significance for this group was Q-27 (assistance with student's transition to college). Since this group ostensibly has spent little time of their own on a college campus (11% of the total never attended college), they are probably most unaware of the challenges and issues involved with transition. In fact, many probably felt ill prepared to assist their child with the transition to college until they received information at this orientation. For that reason, they may have been more in tune with the information presented on transition issues and gained more value from them.

Q-11 (better understanding of parental role) also showed statistically significant difference for those parents with less education. This group is less likely to have an idea of how to support a child in college given the fact they have spent little time in the collegiate environment themselves. Orientation was able to provide them with valuable information that they felt better prepared them to take on their new parental role. As Mullendore (1998) suggested, presenters offered appropriate ways by which parents could continue to be involved in their child's college life. Further, it is probable that Q-31 (recommend orientation to others) also showed significance for similar reasons. Since those with lower education saw value in parent orientation it is reasonable that they would feel it could be beneficial to others.

Although both found the experience valuable, those parents who lived more than fifty miles from campus found significantly more value in parent orientation than did those who lived closer. This expected result may be due mainly to the fact that those who lived farther away from campus came with more questions, concerns, and issues than

those parents who lived closer. These parents will be farther away from their child, and therefore, feel greater concern for their child's well-being and may perceive a greater vested interest in preparing for their child's college career.

For this group as well, anxiety was a tremendous concern. Q-1 (attendance alleviates anxiety) indicated a statistically significant difference between the two. Parents living farther away were able to gain some comfort with the knowledge and information they obtained at orientation and felt anxious about the distance they would soon be from their child.

Parents who lived farther away probably expect a greater transition because it is likely that they will see their child much less than those parents who live within fifty miles of campus. They were possibly appreciative of the fact that they felt reinforcement for continued involvement with their son or daughter in their college career, Q-18 (showed regard for continued parental involvement). This emphasis from orientation came from sessions such as student services, study skills, and an academic overview session, all of which included information on how to assist their son or daughter in the future.

Tools

Wintre & Yaffe (2000) suggest the importance of involving parents and educating them about the institution. It is this knowledge that allows parents to be a factor in the success of their child. Parent orientation at UNT provided information on all facets of the college experience including academics, student services, involvement opportunities, resources for support, and expectations for the upcoming years. Having knowledge about

the institution allows parents to be a resource and support for their sons and daughters. Additionally, providing points of contact is integral to parents feeling prepared (Austin, 1997, Coburn & Woodward, 2001; and Mullendore, 1998). UNT's parent orientation provided these contacts by actually having parents meet faculty and staff and by providing written information in the form of a handbook. Kenny's (1987) study found that students rely heavily on their parents as a source of support. Parents might anticipate this reliance and feel pressure to adequately support them. This study found that all subgroups of parents felt that orientation equipped them with tools to support their sons and daughters.

In Turrentine, et al. (2000), the researchers found that both males and females had similar goals for their child in college. Those goals included quality education and academic success. Presumably, since both have the same goals for their child's education, both would have similar goals and outcomes for orientation as well. This study proved just the opposite.

Unexpectedly, females, by a statistically significant difference, felt more equipped with tools to be supportive of their child at UNT. Although males felt very strongly that they too were well equipped following orientation, the experience proved to be more beneficial to females than males.

Half of the questions in this category, six of twelve, showed statistically significant difference by gender. Q-25 (information to become an informed partner) showed the highest difference between males and females. According to Austin (1997) and Coburn & Woodward (2001) parents need to be informed partners with the

institution to better aid student success. Efforts to inform parents and make them feel like a partner with the institution were made at orientation. Putting actual names with departments, classes, and services was one way that orientation attempted to show parents exactly who their partners were. Again, the presence of multiple females in these leadership roles could presumably be attributed to females feeling better equipped.

Q-10 (opportunities to meet key administrators); Q-12 (participation of faculty); and Q-23 (contacts to assist with resolving future problems) all showed a statistically significant higher mean for females. The manner by which parents were able to meet key administrators may also be a factor. Informally mingling during an extended coffee break, having administrators act as hosts for dinner and lunch, and having the president host breakfast may have had a greater impact on females than it did on male participants.

This study indicates that the tools provided by UNT's parent orientation cross cultural minority barriers given that no statistically significant differences were found by minority status. As expected, these data indicate that all participants, regardless of minority status, felt equipped with enough information to be supportive of their child at UNT.

One question, Q-15 (usefulness of parent handbook), however, did have a statistically significant higher mean for Minority participants than for Non-Minority participants. Minority parents evidently found the parent handbook to be more of a beneficial tool than did the Non-Minority participants. The handbook can serve as a useful resource tool that has a positive impact on first-year students (Boyd, et al., 1997). Minority parents may have been more concerned about the first year of college for their

sons and daughters than non-minority parents. Minority parents must have felt that the handbook would serve just as Mullendore (1998) suggested, as a guide for when the parent returned home.

Although one research study, Mallinckrodt (1988), showed that Black students were more likely to receive support from the campus community than from parents, this study indicates that minority parents find value in the tools presented to them, and will most probably utilize them in the future to support their child. The use of the parent handbook will help the parents help their child. Parents having this information could allow their children to rely on parental support as much or more than the research indicates they rely on the support of the campus community.

The fact that all levels of educational attainment were able to find benefit in the tools they received at orientation implies that the information transmitted is understandable to those with any level of education. As expected, there was no statistically significant difference found between those parents who had higher levels of education (at least an associate's degree) compared to those parents who had lower levels of education. Furthermore, there were no individual questions of the twelve that resulted in statistically significant differences.

The results for this subgroup of educational background indicate that orientation is performing well at equipping parent participants with appropriate tools to support their child. Both populations of this subgroup had high means showing a high appreciation for this component of the orientation process. Specific sessions focusing on health and wellness, academic support, career development, finances and financial aid, housing and

food services, campus involvement opportunities, and safety were all offered to participants as suggested by the literature (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Hatch, 2000; Mullendore, 1998). Having these sessions could account for the positive outcome.

Another contributing factor could be that each subgroup was able to find the tools they needed or were lacking. For example, parents with lower levels of education may have found the sections in the parent handbook that dealt with academic terms and terminology specific to UNT to be beneficial. Conversely, those with higher levels of education may have only needed the terminology specific to UNT available in the handbook. The result for both was favorable.

As expected there was a statistically significant difference between those who live farther away from campus compared to those who live closer on the issue of tools to support their son or daughter. Those who live farther away had a significantly higher mean demonstrating a greater need and appreciation for these tools.

Specifically, Q-9 (contact for housing) was a question that proved to have a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Obviously the students whose parents lived over fifty miles from campus are more likely to live in the residence halls. Therefore, having a housing contact would be a primary need for these parents as they hope to support their child during school. Q-19 (services for illnesses) would also be of greater concern for this population because it is less likely these students would make it home to see their family doctor for most routine illnesses. Parents who lived farther away would be more keenly interested in ensuring the quality and availability of health care

services on campus.

Other questions, Q-10 (opportunities to meet with key administrators), Q-12 (participation of faculty), and Q-25 (information to become an informed partner), all showed statistically significant difference as well. Feeling the need to become acquainted with faculty and administrators to personalize their child's education may account for the difference. Those parents living farther away probably have a stronger need to see faculty and administrators at orientation because they are more apt to spend less physical time on campus than those parents who reside within fifty miles of campus.

Transition

The literature strongly suggested the need for sessions and information relating to the family transition (Austin, 1997; Coburn & Woodward, 2001; Hatch, 2000; Jacobs & With, 2002; Mullendore, 1998). These programs help the parents to begin to understand and prepare for the impending changes to the family. This study found that all four constituencies felt adequately informed about the changing family relationships that college brought. Sessions specifically aimed at transition issues included a video of phone calls home, as suggested by Puig (1982); a counselor who discussed her experiences with the transition to college of her two children; and the vice president for student development who presented information about separation and transition in a speech that included both anecdotal information and services available on campus.

Although not expected, females felt significantly stronger about being informed of impending relationship and family changes. Austin and Sousa's (1991) suggestion that female parents are more likely to be concerned about separation than male parents may

account for the difference. As stated previously, having two women administrators share their own experiences regarding transition may have made more of an impact with females than males. Male parents may have reacted more dramatically to male presenters or possibly to parents of current UNT students sharing their experiences. Additionally, the submission of Wintre & Yaffe (2000) whereby parents having more information on transition allows them to better support their child may ring more true for females than for males. Females may be able to interpret the necessity of understanding changing family relationships and its impact on supporting their new college student.

Three of the four questions in this category showed statistically significant difference. For example, Q-16 (time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff) had results with a statistically significant difference. For this question in particular, females might have taken more advantage of the opportunity to discuss transition issues and therefore it may have had a greater impact on them. Also, having the ability to discuss separation issues during orientation with faculty and staff who have experienced these transitions might have been more helpful for female parents to feel prepared for the future.

Austin (1997) states that parents need to understand how they can continue to play a role in their child's life. In the sessions that dealt specifically with transition, parents were given information as to what their new role could and should be. Q-21 (information on transition issues) and Q-26 (exploration of transition with parents and students) identified significant difference by gender. These two questions further emphasize the female's need to understand the transition process. It is not unreasonable

to find that separation and transition would affect one parent more than the other. This study found that the separation process is more apt to affect females than it does males. For their part, male parents might attribute separation to natural progression and right of passage (Austin and Sousa, 1991) than might the female parents.

There was no statistically significant difference found by minority status for separation and transition issues. It is expected that both minority and non-minority parents go through a similar process of separation and that their attitudes about transition would be similarly strong. This study reinforced that notion. Moreover, all four questions in this category indicated no significant difference, further illustrating comparable viewpoints.

Although very few participants were impacted, two sessions for parent orientation were designated specifically for Spanish-speaking parents. During these two sessions, those parents who spoke only Spanish had an interpreter who served as their personal interpreter and stayed with them the duration of the session. This effort could have helped not only those parents who did not speak English, but also other parents to appreciate the attempts UNT was making to help all parents feel comfortable. This may account for similar results on questions such as Q-6 (UNT supportive of students and parents during transition), Q-16 (time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff), Q-21 (information on transition issues), and Q-26 (exploration of transition with parents and students). Programming efforts focusing on transition at parent orientation apparently met the needs of all minority subgroups.

Both subgroups of educational background felt informed about changing

family relationships as evidenced by their high means. However, as expected, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Having a limited education or more education evidently has little impact on feelings of transition. Research conducted by Austin & Sousa (1991) found that parents who have not attended college are more inclined to feel the loss than their more educated counterparts. This study, however, concludes differently. In fact, there were no individual questions that showed statistically significant difference on this variable.

It appears that the parent orientation program at UNT was able to meet the needs of the participants of all educational levels by sharing with parent's examples of types of situations in which they might soon be involved. These situations were illustrated by utilizing students who role-played phone calls home as well as presenters who shared their personal stories.

Parents who live fifty miles or more from UNT saw greater value in the information shared regarding transition issues than did their counterparts who resided closer, as hypothesized. It seems reasonable that parents who live farther away will see their sons and daughters less and will feel the separation and transition issues more acutely. Austin and Sousa (1991) also hypothesized that parents of students who commute have less concern over transition issues than those parents whose children will be living on campus. By residing over fifty miles from campus it is likely that those students will live on or near campus and not commute from home.

Two of the four questions showed statistically significant differences by distance from home. Q-16 (time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff) and Q-21

(information on transition issues) illustrate that parents who live farther away feel more strongly about transition issues. Having time to discuss transition with experts on campus may reflect the difference. Those who live farther are bracing and preparing more for the transition. For that reason they may be taking more time to discuss issues particular to their own situations with available faculty and staff. This interaction could, therefore, be more helpful to these parents who live more than fifty miles from campus. Additionally, simply having information on transition and separation issues would also account for the difference. Preparation involves information gathering and is probably a key reason why these parents chose to attend orientation in the first place.

Partnership

The fourth component of parent orientation, as suggested in the literature, is that of establishing a positive relationship with the institution. Tederman (1997) states that an institution must involve the parents to not only create a relationship with the parent but also to better ensure that parent is able to serve as a resource for their students. As Taub (1997) notes, parental attachment does not decrease over the course of college. Therefore, the institution should encourage the development of relationships with parents even after the first year. Parent orientation attempted to accomplish this by showing parents that UNT had a high regard for its students, concern for students' success, and that it values parents as members of the university community. Specifically, orientation highlighted services and programs that supported students and assisted in their success; discussed appropriate means by which parents could continue to be involved in their student's college life; worked to provide a consistent welcoming environment with informal social

gatherings; and provided access to faculty and staff. The vice presidents, academic deans, and the president regularly address the parents and informally gather with parents during various sessions of orientation. This study proved that all populations felt that they had established a positive relationship with UNT. However, in all but one category, there were no statistically significant differences between the populations considered, as expected.

While none was expected, this study did find a statistically significant difference by gender as to whether or not parents established a strong relationship with UNT. Females felt more strongly about establishing a relationship with the university than did males. In so doing, females felt a stronger need to connect to the new home of their son or daughter. Dodge (1990) notes in his study that parents (no designation by gender) wanted to remain actively involved in their child's education. This study affirms that female parents have a stronger desire to remain involved at the collegiate level.

Cohen (1985) suggests a triad relationship with the institution, student and parent all working to assist the student in being successful. Feeling like a partner and a member of the community is important for females as suggested by the results of Q-7 (parent is a partner with UNT) and Q-22 (parent is a part of the community). Both of these questions showed a statistically significant difference exists between females and males. One explanation for the difference in Q-7 could be that females may have been faster developing relationships with faculty and staff. These new relationships may have contributed to females feeling more instantly partnered with the institution. For males that relationship may take longer, therefore, making the feeling of partnership take

longer.

Helping parents to feel more actively involved is another way in which orientation helped develop the concepts of partnership and community. The literature indicates that the major component an institution should convey to parents is that it has a regard for the parent's role in their child's life (Cohen, 1985; Hatch, 2000). Membership in UNT's Parent Association was consistently promoted at parent orientation. Through this promotion, the coordinator of orientation was further able to convey the desire of the university to create a solid relationship with the parents throughout the student's academic career. Evidently female parents appreciated this concept more than their male counterparts. And as indicated by all four research questions showing statistical significance by gender, women apparently have more fervent feelings regarding the transition of a child from home to college.

As was found consistently throughout this study, there was no statistically significant difference by minority status as to whether parents established a strong partnership with UNT. The parent orientation program seemingly appeals to both minority and non-minority participants with little variation by question. It may reflect the notion that both groups have the same needs in developing a positive relationship with an institution. It could also relate to the program presented to the parents in that it meets all needs of participants regardless of race or ethnicity.

Minority needs are not separated from the needs of all parents in the program. For example, there are no sessions on diversity or programs specific to any minority status. Ostensibly the lack of such programming could negatively affect the feelings of minority

parents regarding orientation and could inhibit the desire for minority parents to want to create a relationship with the institution. It seems, nevertheless, that parent orientation crosses all boundaries since all parents feel a strong positive relationship with the institution because the institution caters to the needs of all parents by not segmenting the population. Making parents feel welcome and reinforcing the parent's connection to their child could contribute to that feeling.

Educational background had no significance as it relates to whether parents established a positive relationship with the institution, as expected. This finding could be due to the fact that orientation connected both subgroups equally to the institution. The data from this study indicates that both those with lower levels of education and higher levels of education feel a similarly strong positive relationship with UNT.

One question within this category noted a statistically significant difference. Q-7 (parent is partner with UNT) illustrates that those parents with a more limited educational background felt more strongly that they were partners with UNT after attending parent orientation. This finding could be a result of this subgroup of parents needing to feel like a partner based upon their inexperience at the collegiate level. Conversely, those parents with more education may simply not feel the need to be a partner with the institution because they are more comfortable with the UNT system and their ability to support their child based upon their educational experience.

It was hypothesized that no difference would be found regarding establishing a positive relationship with the institution by distance from home. This study confirmed that hypothesis. Both subgroups of parents, those living within fifty miles and those

residing more than fifty miles from campus, felt equally that they indeed had a positive relationship with the institution. Perhaps parent orientation was able to bridge the distance gap and cater appropriately to parents from all geographic locations.

One question notwithstanding, however, indicated a statistically significant difference. Q-17 (UNT provides supportive environment) was felt more strongly by parents who lived farther away from campus. It is this group that is more likely to feel the need for a relationship because they must rely much more on the institution to be supportive of their child than those parents who are within an hour drive of UNT. It would seem that those parents who can be with their child more often without restrictions of distance may feel that they can provide the supportive environment their child needs and discount the importance of the institution doing so.

Quality

The overall high average of means, 4.37, suggests that most parents felt that orientation was a quality event. The top five rated questions indicate the components that parents felt overall were the best: Q-31 (recommend attendance to other new UNT parents), Q-30 (feel welcome at UNT), Q-3 (UNT will provide quality education), Q-29 (UNT education will be meaningful), and Q-12 (participation of faculty).

The two highest means, Q-31 and Q-30, indicate an overall perception of effectiveness from the participants. It appears that parent participants found sufficient quality in the program to warrant a recommendation of the program to other parents. It seems that parents felt that orientation positively addressed all four issues (perceived value, equipped with tools, knowledgeable of transition issues, and establishment of a

positive relationship with the institution). It is made known from the beginning of orientation that one of the purposes is to ensure that they have all of their questions answered by the time the session is complete. Efforts are made to respond to the individual concerns and questions that parents have. The coordinators of the program are able to be with the parents most of each session and be a consistent source of contact for the parents. Those parents who have individual concerns and questions that are not answered at specific sessions are able to ask the coordinators for assistance. For that reason, parent scores may reflect that orientation was worth their time and that they feel it would be worth the time of other new parents as well.

The willingness of faculty and staff to share their time and experiences may account for parents feeling overwhelmingly welcome on campus. At almost every stage of orientation, parents are exposed to faculty and staff who discuss their areas of expertise. Several opportunities for questions and answers are held both formally and informally. Faculty and staff are very willing during these exchanges to accommodate the parents. Additionally, many departments have designated open houses to allow parents to tour and have specific questions about these departments answered. Faculty have been able to provide information and to assist parents in feeling comfortable with the campus. Also, consistently during orientation, future opportunities for contact between parents and students are promoted. Parents are encouraged to return for move-in day (Sunday Funday), Parent and Family Weekend, and other future athletic events and musical performances. By openly extending invitations for future events, parents may perceive immediately a welcoming environment on behalf of UNT.

The other three highly rated components relate specifically to academics. Orientation seems able to emphasize the value of receiving an education from UNT. One particular session driving this result is most likely the academic dean session. This session is the third most highly rated, receiving a mean of 4.43 on a 5.0 scale (Student Development Parent Orientation Survey, University of North Texas, 2002). Parents attend sessions according to their son or daughter's academic major where the dean and/or the associate dean of the college communicate expectations, philosophy, opportunities, and goals of their particular college. From this session in particular parents receive a clear picture of the quality of each academic program and how important a degree from each college can be for their child.

Additionally, the highest rated program is the musical performance presented by students from the College of Music. Although UNT has a reputation as having the premier jazz studies program in the world, many parents have not heard actual students perform. Students at this performance not only sing and play music, but also discuss their educational experiences at UNT. Parents obviously appreciate their ability to perform, but also their comments about the quality of their education.

The high ranking of Q-12 (participation of faculty) reinforces that parents attend orientation to learn more about the academic requirements and expectations for their child. The number of faculty and academic administrators who participate in parent orientation may contribute to this high rating. Faculty are present in almost all facets of the program including the first session on parent expectations, acting as table hosts at dinner, leading and participating in the academic overview, attending the coffee break,

leading the academic dean sessions, acting as table hosts at lunch, and presenting various breakout sessions. Parents obviously feel the contact with faculty is an important component of the orientation program.

The lowest five rated responses were Q-20 (financial aid), Q-24 (psychological counseling), Q-16 (time to discuss transition issues with faculty and staff), Q-22 (parents are part of UNT community), and Q-19 (services for illness). Even though these were at the bottom of the scale, all five reflect a positive opinion from the participants. Three of the five responses contain services of specific departments on campus, Student Financial Aid and Scholarships, Counseling and Testing, and the Student Health and Wellness Center. Their lower score could be a result of parents placing less importance to these areas or that they don't have questions or concerns related to these areas. Another explanation could be parents did not have as good of an experience with representatives from these departments and rated them lower as a result.

The findings regarding time to discuss transition issues and feeling part of the UNT community reflect larger scopes. Overall, parents may have felt that they did not have adequate opportunity to discuss transition issues or they may have not felt the importance of such discussion. Additionally, being a part of the campus community may have simply ranked lower on the scale of importance for parents and was therefore rated accordingly. Some parents may not feel a part of the community at such an early juncture of their child's college career. It may take more involvement opportunities and the institution consistently making these efforts for these parents to feel they are part of the UNT community. However, it is possible that the efforts extended in this regard were not

as high of quality as other components.

Overall the range of scores indicates a high quality program. Even the lowest score of 3.823 indicates a positive response being above the “No Opinion” scale of three. In addition, more items (20) were ranked above the mean than below (11). Parent opinions of orientation illustrate that positive feelings and regard that they have for UNT and for the future academic endeavors of their child.

Conclusions

Generally, all aspects of the parent orientation program were found to be positive by every subgroup of the participants. Parents found value in the orientation program and how it prepared them to support their new college student. It appears that the orientation program is providing a quality experience for all of its participants regardless of gender, background, educational background, or distance from home.

This study indicates that overall the parent orientation process is very different for women than it is for men. In all four components studied, women had a stronger feeling than the males. Continuing to satisfy the needs of female participants is essential to the success of the orientation program.

Minority status had no significant impact on the outcomes of orientation according to the participants, which may be a result of diverse programming, and the perception by all that UNT is an open and welcoming campus. The fact that very little difference was found on the issues raised in the survey indicate that the parent orientation program is able to cross all cultural boundaries in meeting the needs of its participants.

Educational background proved not to be a huge factor in the results according to

this study. Although it can have a bearing, overall it was not significant. The ease of being acquainted with the environment for those who have college experience may have as much of an impact as the level of educational attainment. Conversely, the fear of the unknown, for those who have little or no college experience, can impact the outcomes in a similar fashion.

The distance the parents lived from UNT revealed significant differences in three of the four categories. The farther a parent resides from UNT, the more valuable the orientation experience was for them. Providing adequate information regarding services and programs helped make parents feel more comfortable having their child live far away from home. Additionally, having faculty and staff available and willing to answer questions and respond to concerns also made parents feel less anxiety. Actually being able to put a face with a name seemed important for those parents who were entrusting the future care of their child to UNT.

Recommendations for Research

With very little research conducted on parent orientation there are several possibilities for future studies. A quantitative study of parent orientation programs on the national level could provide a benchmark by which to compare individual studies. Such a study could compare four-year public institutions with four-year private institutions and the impact orientation has on its constituents.

Given the considerable difference between male and female perceptions in this study, it is recommended that research be conducted to determine the needs that males have in orientation. From the literature review there seems to be no research conducted

specifically to address the differing needs of parents by gender. A formal study to accomplish this notion could greatly assist orientation planners in preparing programs for both mothers and fathers of new students.

Another area of research could be comparing the perceived value of orientation to both parents and their students. Many institutions assess the value of both their parent and student programs individually, yet rarely, if at all, attempt to compare the outcomes of the students as it relates to their parents who attend parent orientation. This research could be utilized for those who conduct simultaneous parent and new student programs to better meet the needs of both. Additionally, a pre-test, post-test could be conducted to determine initial expectations and how orientation was able to meet them.

With statistical significance found in three of the four areas of this study by distance from home, a research study could be conducted to determine if students who reside farther away from campus have similar differences. This study could determine if these students need additional assistance at orientation to reinforce familial and parental support.

Finally, a follow-up qualitative study could be conducted at UNT to further explain differences by the four designated subgroups of participants. This study could utilize interviews and focus groups to identify areas in need of improvement.

Recommendations for Practice

Since this study indicated that more females participated and that the overall experience for women is significantly different for them than it is for their male counterparts. Orientation at UNT needs to continue to pay attention to the female mindset

and cater to their obvious needs. Even though males rated parent orientation highly, it might prove to be beneficial to attempt to appeal more to the needs of the male participants in the future. Programming designed specifically for males separate from females might need to be added. One way to include that would be to offer specific breakout sessions for mothers and fathers utilizing parents of current UNT students.

With minority status having little or no bearing on the outcomes, the process of orientation at UNT should continue on in the same vein. As the population in the state continues to grow in minority numbers, it is critical that programming reflect the diverse population. Orientation coordinators should continue to ensure that diverse presenters and programming are included in aspects of the event. Additionally, involving minority parents in the planning stages of orientation could positively impact this particular subgroup.

Since components of value saw a statistically significant difference by educational level, orientation coordinators should remain focused on the needs of this subgroup. Continuing to provide information in varying levels of experience can contribute to all parents having a more valuable experience. Finding new and creative ways of enhancing the experience for those who have a lower educational background can only enhance the program.

Since the orientation program appealed significantly more to those parents living farther than fifty miles from UNT, and this population reflects a majority of the participants, programming targeted to their needs must continue. Continuing with programs that help to make these parents feel welcome and that alleviate their anxieties

about their child being far from home will assist in their transition. Allowing more opportunities for parents to connect to the institution can be critical in helping to establish a positive relationship.

Finally, a component not currently offered to parents, but that is suggested by the literature, is the inclusion of current UNT parents as presenters at orientation. These current parents could offer their testimonials and experiences to new parents and provide a unique perspective on imminent family changes. New parents might be better able to identify with parents who had actually navigated the system as an outsider than with administrators or faculty who have inside knowledge of the institution's procedures.

APPENDIX A
INSTRUMENT

**Parent Orientation Survey
Summer 2002**

Shade circles like this: ●
Not like this: ☒ ☑
Use a pen or number two pencil.

A. What is your gender?

- ☐ 1. Female
☐ 2. Male

B. What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ 1. African-American
☐ 2. Asian/Pacific Islander
☐ 3. Caucasian/White
☐ 4. Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American
☐ 5. Native American (Indian, Alaskan, Hawaiian)
☐ 6. Other

C. What is your educational background?

(Please select the highest level of education completed)

- ☐ 1. Completed some high school
☐ 2. Completed GED
☐ 3. Graduated from high school
☐ 4. Completed some college
☐ 5. Have an associates degree
☐ 6. Have a bachelors degree
☐ 7. Have a masters degree
☐ 8. Have a doctoral degree

D. How many miles from UNT do you live?

- ☐ 1. 1-10 miles
☐ 2. 11-20 miles
☐ 3. 21-30 miles
☐ 4. 31-40 miles
☐ 5. Greater than 50 miles

AGREE/DISAGREE. Respond to each item by circling the number (1,2,3,4,0) that best indicates your opinion.

- 1= Strongly Agree
2= Agree
3= Disagree
4= Strongly Disagree
5= No Opinion or Not Applicable

	SA	A	D	SD	NO
1. Attending parent orientation has helped alleviate anxiety I had about my student attending UNT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I have been provided adequate points of contact to act as a referral agent to my student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I believe that UNT will provide my student with a quality education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Because of parent orientation, I am more knowledgeable about UNT's expectations of my student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I know what resources are available to my student to assist him/her with career development and selection.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I believe UNT will be supportive of both my student and me through the transition to college.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I believe I am a partner with the University in my student's education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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	SA	A	D	SD	N/D
8. I found the presenters and speakers at parent orientation to be knowledgeable and competent in their areas of expertise.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I know whom to contact should a question arise regarding my student's housing situation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I believe parent orientation provided opportunities for me to meet with key administrators.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Through parent orientation, I have a better understanding of the role I can play in assisting my student with the transition to college.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I found the participation of faculty in parent orientation to be important.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I believe the University cares about the education of my student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Because of parent orientation, I have a better understanding of what my student will experience at UNT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. I believe the parent handbook will serve as a useful resource tool in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. At parent orientation, I had adequate time to discuss my concerns regarding transition issues with administrators and/or faculty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. I believe UNT will provide an environment that is supportive to my student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. UNT provided an orientation experience to parents that showed regard for appropriate continued parental involvement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. I know what services UNT provides for students in case of illness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. My questions about financial aid have been answered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Parent orientation provided me with information on issues of separation and transition to college.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. I, as a parent, feel that I am part of the community at UNT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. If a problem were to arise with my student, I believe I have made UNT contacts at this program that I can utilize to assist me with resolving the problem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. I know whom to contact should my student need psychological counseling at UNT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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	SA	A	D	SD	N/O
25. The University provided me with information to become an informed partner in my student's education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. Parent orientation offered information that explores the transition issues affecting both parents and students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. Because of parent orientation, I have a better understanding of my role in assisting my student with the transition to college.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. I have information on academic support programs and resources available to my student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. I feel an education from UNT will be meaningful to my student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. I feel welcome at UNT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31. I would recommend parent orientation to new UNT parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32. On a scale of one (low) to ten (high) please rank the quality of this Parent Orientation Program.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

APPENDIX B
COVER LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parent:

I am conducting a survey on the effectiveness of the parent orientation program at the University of North Texas. I believe the data collected will assist the university in determining how it is meeting its goals for parent orientation and identify areas for improvement.

Attached is the survey which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. I request that you assist in this study by completing the survey and placing it in the box at the door as you leave. The survey measures your perception of the effectiveness of the parent orientation program in which you have just participated. All responses are kept confidential and your survey will not identify you in any way as the respondent. You are not required to participate in this study and have the option of simply not completing the survey.

If you have questions regarding this survey or your participation in it, please feel free to contact Dr. John L. Baier, Professor of Higher Education at the University of North Texas. He can be reached by email at baier@coefs.coe.unt.edu or by phone at (940) 565-2355.

Thank you for your time and your contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth With
Assistant Vice President for Student Development
and doctoral student in Higher Education (UNT)
ewith@unt.edu
(940) 565-4909

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (940) 565-3940.

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB
FROM 6/6/12 TO 6/5/13
JS

APPENDIX C
HUMAN SUBJECTS FORM

UNIVERSITY^{of} NORTH TEXAS

Office of Research Services

June 6, 2002

Elizabeth With
2413 Ainsley Drive
Flower Mound, TX 75028

RE: Human Subjects Application No. 02-165


Dear Ms. With,

Your proposal titled "Assessment of the parent Orientation Program at the University of North Texas" has been approved by the Institutional Review Board and is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.101. **Federal policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only.**

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy of **use this form only** for your study subjects.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations require that you submit annual and terminal progress reports to the UNT Institutional Review Board. Further, the UNT IRB must re-review this project annually and/or prior to any modifications you make in the approved project. Please contact me if you wish to make such changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Peter L. Shillingsburg
Chair
Institutional Review Board

PS:sb

P.O. Box 305250 • Denton, Texas 76203-5250 • (940) 565-3940
Fax (940) 565-4277 • TTY (800) RELAY TX • www.unt.edu

APPENDIX D

CATEGORIZATION OF SURVEY QUESTIONS BY RESEARCH QUESTION

Research Question	Question Number	Question content
Research Question 1	1	Attendance alleviates anxiety
	4	More knowledgeable about UNT's expectations
	8	Speakers are knowledgeable and competent
	11	Better understanding of parental role
	14	Better understanding of student experience
	18	UNT regard for continued parental involvement
	27	Assistance with student's transition to college
	31	Recommend orientation to others
Research Question 2	2	Adequate points of contact
	5	Resources for career development
	9	Contact for housing
	10	Opportunity to meet with key administrators
	12	Participation of faculty
	15	Usefulness of parent handbook
	19	Services for illnesses
	20	Financial aid
	23	Contacts to assist with resolving future problems
	24	Psychological counseling
	25	Information to become informed partner
	28	Information on academic support programs
Research Question 3	6	UNT supportive of students and parents during transition
	16	Time to discuss transitions with faculty and staff
	21	Information on transition issues
	26	Exploration of transition with parents and students
Research Question 4	3	UNT will provide quality education
	7	Parent is partner with UNT
	13	UNT cares about student
	17	UNT provides supportive environment
	22	Parent is part of UNT community
	29	UNT education will be meaningful
	30	Feel welcome at UNT

APPENDIX E
COMMENTS FROM SURVEYS

All of the comments below are direct unedited quotes from surveys returned.

- Have some concerns about UNT providing a quality education.
- Thanks for a great experience. It seems to have turned my daughter from a reluctant student into a student eagerly looking forward to the college experience at UNT.
- First day 3-1/2 hour no break session was much too long.
- A little too long.
- Great food! Everyone was friendly and helpful!!
- Excellent!! Thank you-
- I would like to see recycling of all plastic containers used during orientation. I feel I didn't get information on health care available on campus or nearby. Maybe I just missed it. Just for info – provide parents with student's schedule.
- Need to provide open-ended question for comments that do not fall within the parameter of the prior questions. Room was cold during programming. Dorm room was extremely cold. Personnel was exceptionally helpful and friendly.
- I feel like the student orientation information should include more of the information that the parents received. Once school starts, my child will be loaded down with rehearsals and practicing and won't be able to seek out information that could have been given to him easily during orientation, such as the sports extras, mentoring programs, etc. He said that his team leader knew nothing about the music program, so he couldn't get his questions answered.
- Do not tell the students to take only twelve hours and to not let their parents talk them out of it! Students who are not working certainly need more than twelve hours to stay

busy and to stay on campus.

- Extremely valuable!
- I'd recommend packing this into two days.
- Would be higher except for the length of the program. I would have preferred two days and one night.
- There is some repetition and I think it could be shortened.
- The buses were a great convenience but lacked a schedule. Wasn't sure where to catch rides back to Gateway. The drivers also seemed to have confusion as to what they were doing.
- I think we need a bit more time with the students. Also, please repeat the questions asked – this was the single most irritating thing – we could not hear the questions at all – so some of the answers meant nothing. Overall – this was excellent for parents and kids.
- Please do not tell children (young adults) to only take 12 hrs – this may be the suggestion for some students – but others should and can handle 15 hrs. It is hard to redirect after they have been told something else by an advisor.
- The orientation is too long, the kids are very tired. Advising with my child was very poor. He had an assistant that was very busy and did not ask my son questions as to his interest. It got fouled up and he was set up in the wrong program. UNT has a lot of things to offer. That is good.
- Enjoyed orientation, scheduling classes when everything is closed is disappointing. Maybe we can be told sooner what's available.

- I would like more time with my student to discuss the schedule. My student is overwhelmed.
- You need to cut out last half day.
- Too drawn out. Could have been accomplished in one day or day and a half. Would like to have met with my child's advisor to work on schedule. You want our money but don't want our involvement with class registration. Your point about meeting our student to make payment was over-emphasized it canceled out all the warm fuzzies about caring about the parent and student experience.
- Excellent program. However, there is not enough time in program to connect with daughter to talk about schedule. She was equally frustrated about this since she had several questions for us. A schedule block (one hour possibly) would be helpful.
Thank you for your friendliness and hospitality.
- Very informative! Thank you for having us!
- My student really wanted info not cheers – she was very interested in the info I got and wanted to know why she didn't get it, as she is the one that needs to know. When we visited our family doctor, she said UNT was a well-known party school. I hope she was wrong but this weekend really raised those doubts. I really hope classes are different from orientation because we are here for the education and that was not apparent to the students this week.
- The parent orientation was excellent, but my concerns are about the student orientation. We are from out of state. My son is a music major. He was very discouraged at the dominance of cheerleading type activities and atmosphere in the

student orientation. Two other parents told me that their students said the same thing. I think the student group leaders need to be trained in awareness of the diversity of freshmen so they are more balanced – not so dominant to one type of freshman. This is very alienating to some kids.

- Most of my friends complained about orientation at their campuses. You all provided such warmth and understanding that each student should be successful with all the resources if they just get out of bed and do something. I'm glad to be twenty minutes away to let him fly with eagles and have the info to direct him to other helps along the way of his flight.
- This is my third freshman orientation. I've attended one at UH and Tech. This orientation is comparable. I think too much emphasis is put on the transition and separation issue. Most parents I spoke with were much more concerned about money and enough time devoted to that.
- Too long for students and parents. You asked the wrong questions in the evaluation. The student orientation has problems. It is not reaching at least half of the students. Perform more evaluations.
- Excellent job! Well organized. One suggestion is to keep parent sessions to 45 minutes then break for ten. It is hard to sit for 2 to 2-1/2 hours at a time for anyone. It is also necessary to keep parent's attention. People become restless and tend to "tune out" important details.
- More breaks during session would be a good idea. Again, financial aid front desk was disappointing – the woman at the desk did not explain important details and acted as

though she did not have time. I appreciate all of the work you did to make the parents welcome, informed and I felt very taken care of with refreshments, transportation, signage and events. Thank you!

- Classes that were closed – blocks of classes should have been blocked to accommodate the students who came to the last session. My student and many other students who made the expense and took time off to attend were not able to get classes they need and want. My student's classes were all full. This is not fair if classes are on a first come first serve basis, we would have sent her to the first session. If you were going to test them early, why were they kept up so late? This is not logical. Instead of t-shirts why not canvas bags to carry all the info?
- A really good job!
- May have more repetition than necessary – lose attention. Schedule more down time for parents. Speakers during meals are okay but during lunch day #2 I felt the speaker was too long. This is a good time to interact with parents of other students and better to allow for relaxation during meal.
- Some sessions were long especially on the first day when a lot of parents have traveled long distances to get to orientation. Orientation was well organized. Food was good. It would be helpful if parents also got a copy of the student's schedule so that we would know when to make contact with them if the need arises.
- At 2 of the 3 break out sessions I attended the presenter did not show up. Other than that, it was a great experience. I would recommend it to any new UNT parent. It was great.

- I feel parents are entitled to grades. We are responsible for the bill.
- Spencer was such a great help. Thanks.
- I really enjoyed myself.
- Spend more time on academics! Let us hear from more professors.
- Everything and everyone was very helpful and knowledgeable. I was very impressed with parent orientation. I know my daughter will be happy here at UNT as she works toward a bachelor's of science. Thank you.
- Would have liked to see either a brief talk or even short bus tour into town of Denton might be beneficial to some out of state parents.

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